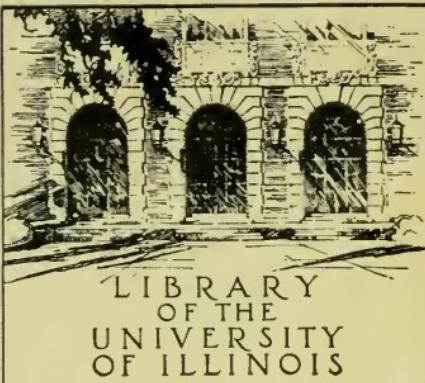


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AUDLOW



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# JOHNNY LUDLOW.

"We spake of many a vanished scene,  
    Of what we once had thought and said,  
Of what had been, and might have been,  
    And who was changed, and who was dead."

LONGFELLOW.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON:  
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,  
NEW BURLINGTON STREET,  
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty.  
1874.

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# JOHNNY LUDLOW.

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## XIX.

### DAVID GARTH'S NIGHT-WATCH.

IT was the following year, and we were again at Crabb Cot. Fever had broken out at Dr. Frost's, and the school was dismissed. The leaves were falling late that year, for November was nearly half through, and they strewed the ground. But if the leaves were late, the frost was early. The weather had come in curiously cold. Three days before the morning I am going to speak of, the warm weather suddenly changed to a biting cold ; it had gone on increasing, and was now as freezing as January. It is not often you see ice mingling with the dead leaves of autumn. Both the ice and the leaves have to do with the thing that happened : and I think you often find that if the weather is very unusually out of the common, we get something by which to remember it.

At the corner of a field between our house and North Crabb, stood a small solitary dwell-

ing, called Willow Brook Cottage: but the brook from which it took its name was dry now. The house had a lonely look, and was lonely; and perhaps that kept it empty. It had been unoccupied for more than a year, when the Squire, tired of seeing it so, happened to say in the hearing of James Hill, that new bailiff of ours, that he would let it for almost a nominal rent. Hill snapped at the words and said he would be glad to rent it: for some cause or other he did not like the house he was in, and had been wanting to leave it. At least, he said this: but he was of a frightfully stingy turn, and we all thought the low rent prompted him. Hill, this working bailiff, was a steady man, but severe upon everybody.

It was during this early frost that he was beginning to move in. One morning after breakfast, I was taking the broad pathway across the fields to North Crabb, which led close by Willow Cottage, and saw Hill wheeling a small-sized truck up with some of his household goods. He was a tall, strong man, and the cold was tolerably sharp, but the load had warmed him.

“Good morning, Master Johnny.”

“Making ready for the flitting, Hill?”

Hill wheeled the truck to the door, and sat down on one of its handles while he wiped his face. It was an honest, cross face; red habitually. The house had a good large garden on

its side, enclosed by wooden palings ; with a shut-in shed and some pigstys at the back. Lots of trees overshadowed the palings : the fallen leaves making, just now, a border to the garden ankle-deep, inside and out.

"A fine labour I shall have, to get the place into order!" cried Hill, pointing to some broken palings and the overgrown branches. "Don't think but what the Squire has got the best bargain, after all!"

"You'd say that, Hill, if he gave you a house rent-free."

Hill took the key from his pocket, unlocked the door, and we went in. This lower room was boarded ; the kitchen was at the back ; above were two fair-sized chambers. One of them looked to Crabb Ravine ; the other was only lighted from above—by a skylight in the roof.

"You have had fires here, Hill!"

"I had 'em in every room all day yesterday, sir, and am going to light 'em again now. My wife said it must be done ; and she warn't far wrong ; for a damp house plays the mischief with one's bones. The fools that women be, to be sure!—and my wife's the worst of 'em."

"What has your wife done?"

"She had a bit of a accident yesterday, Master Johnny. A coming out with a few things for this place, she stepped upon some ice, and fell ; it gave her ankle a twist, and she had to be helped home. I'm blest if she's

not a-saying now that it's a ill-omen ! Because she can't get about and help to shift the things in here, she says we shan't have nothing but ill-luck in the place."

I had heard already of the twist. Hill's wife was a little shrinking woman, mild and gentle, quite superior to him. She was a widow when he married her a short while ago, a Mrs. Garth, with one son, David. Miss Timmens, the schoolmistress at North Crabb, was her sister. On the previous morning a letter had come from Worcester, saying their mother, Mrs. Timmens, was taken dangerously ill, and asking them to go over. Miss Timmens went ; Hill refused his wife's going. How could he get along at moving-time without her ? he demanded. She cried and implored, but Hill was harder than flint. So she had to remain at home, and set about her preparations for removal ; surly tempered Hill was master and mistress. In starting out with the first lot of movables—a few things carried in her arms—the accident occurred. So that, for the helping to move, she was useless ; and the neighbours, ever ready to take part in a matrimonial grievance, said it served Hill right. Any way, it did not improve his temper.

" When do you get in here, Hill ? "

" To-morrow, Master Johnny, please the pigs. But for the wife's awk'ardness we'd ha' been in to-day. As to any help Davvy could

give, it's worth no more nor a rat's; he haven't got much more strength in him nor one neither. Drat the boy!"

Leaving Hill to his task, I went on; and in passing Mrs. Hill's dwelling, I thought I'd give a look in to see how the ankle was. The cottage stood by itself, just as this other one did, but was less lonely, for the Crabb houses were round about. Davy's voice called out, "Come in."

He was the handiest little fellow possible for any kind of housework—or for sewing, either; but not half strong enough or rough enough for a boy. His soft brown eyes had a shrinking tenderness in them, his face looked delicate as a girl's, and his hair hung in curls. But he was a little bit deformed in the back—some called it only a stoop in the shoulders—and, though fourteen, might have been taken for ten. The boy's love for his mother was something good. They had lived at Worcester, she having a small income, where he had been well brought up. When she married Hill—all her friends were against it, and it was in fact a frightful mistake—of course they had to come to North Crabb; but Davy was not happy. A timid lad always, he could not overcome his first fear of Hill. Not that the man was unkind, only rough and resolute.

Davy was washing up the breakfast things; his mother sat by, sorting out the contents of a chest: a neat little woman in a green stuff

gown, with the same sweet eyes as David's and the same shrinking look in them. She left off when I went in, and said her ankle was no worse.

"It's a pity it happened just now, Mrs. Hill."

"I'd have given a great deal for it not to, sir. They call me foolish, I know; always have done; but it just seems to me like a bad omen. I had got a few articles in my arms, the first trifles we'd begun to move, and down I fell on going out at this door. To me it seems nothing but a warning that we ought not to move in to Willow Cottage."

David had halted with his work at the tea-cups, his brown eyes fixed on his mother. That it was not the first time he had listened to the superstition, and that he was every whit as bad as she, might be plainly seen.

"I have never liked the thought of that new place from the first, Master Johnny. It is as if something held me back from it. Hill, he keeps saying that it's a convenient dwelling, and dirt-cheap; and so it is; but I don't like the notion of it. No more does David."

"Oh, I dare say you will like it when you get in, Mrs. Hill; and David, too."

"It is to be hoped so, sir."

The day went on; and its after events I can only speak of from hearsay. Hill moved in a good portion of his goods, David carrying some

of the light things. Luke Macintosh was asked to go and sleep in the house that night as a safeguard against thieves, but he flatly refused, unless somebody slept there with him. Hill ridiculed him for his cowardice; and finally agreed that David should bear him company.

He made the bargain without his wife. She had other views for David. Her intention was to send the lad over to Worcester by the seven o'clock evening train; not so much because his bed and bedding had been carried off and there was nothing for him to sleep on, but that his dying grandmother had expressed a wish to see him. To hear then that David was not to go, did not please Mrs. Hill.

It was David himself who carried in the news. She had the tea waiting on the table when they came in: David first; for his step-father had stopped to speak to somebody in the road.

"But David, dear—you *must* go to Worcester," she said, when he told her.

"He will never let me, mother," was David's whispered answer. "He says the things might be stolen if nobody takes care of them: and Macintosh is afraid to be there alone."

She paused and looked at him, a thought striking her. The boy was leaning upon her in his fond manner, his hand in hers.

"Should you be afraid, David?"

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

"Not—I think—with Luke. We are to be in the same room, mother?"

But Mrs. Hill noticed that his voice was hesitating; that his small weak hand trembled in hers. There was not a more morally brave heart than David Garth's; he had had a religious training; but at being alone in the dark he was a very coward, afraid of ghosts and goblins.

"Hill," said she to her husband when he stamped in, wiping his shoes, the lad having gone then to wash his hands, "I cannot let David sleep in the other house to-night. He will be too timid."

"Timid!" repeated Hill, staring at the words. "Why Luke Macintosh will be with him."

"David won't like it. Macintosh is nothing but a coward himself."

"Don't thee be a fool, and show it," returned rough Hill. "Thee'll keep that boy a baby for his life. Davvy would as soon sleep in the house alone, as not, but for the folly put into his head by you. And why not? He's fourteen."

Hill—to give him his due—only spoke as he thought. That any one in the world, grown to fourteen and upwards, could be truly afraid of sleeping in a house alone, was to him literally incomprehensible—a social phenomenon never to be understood.

"I said he must go over to Worcester to see mother, James," she meekly resumed; "you know I did."

"Well he can't go to-night; he shall go in the morning. There! He may stop with her for a week, an' ye like, for all the good he's of to me."

"Mother's looking for him to-night, and he ought to go. The dying——"

"Now just you drop it, for he can't be spared," interrupted Hill. "The goods might be stole, with all the loose characters there is about, and that fool of a Macintosh won't go in of himself. He's a regular coward! Davvy must keep him company—it's not so much he does for his keep—and he may start for Worcester by daylight."

Whenever Hill came down upon her with this resolute decision, it struck her timid forthwith. The allusion to the boy's keep was an additional stab; for it was beginning to be rather a sore subject. An uncle at Worcester, who had no family and was well to do, had partly offered to adopt the lad; but it was not settled yet. Davy was a great favourite with all the relatives; Miss Timmens, the school-mistress, doted on him. Mrs. Hill, not venturing on further remonstrance, made the best of the situation.

"Davy, you are to go to Worcester the first thing in the morning," she said, when he came

back from washing his hands : “ so as soon as you’ve been home and had a bit o’ breakfast, you shall run off to the train.”

The tea over, Hill went out on some business, saying he should be in at eight, or thereabouts, to go with Davy to the cottage. As the hour drew near, David, sitting over the fire with his mother in pleasant talk, as they loved to do, asked if he should read before he went : for her habit was to read in the Bible to him, or cause him to read to her, the last thing.

“ Yes, dear,” she said. “ Read the ninety-first Psalm.”

So David read it. Closing the book when it was over, he sat with it on his knee, thoughtfully.

“ If we could but *see* the angels, mother ! It is so difficult to remember always that they are close around, taking care of us.”

“ So it is, Davy. Most of us forget it.”

“ When life’s over it will be so pleasant for them to carry us away to Heaven ! I wish you and I could go together, mother.”

“ We shall each go when God pleases, David.”

“ Oh, yes, I know that.”

Mrs. Hill, remembering this little bit of conversation, word for word, repeated it afterwards to me and others, with how they had sat, and David’s looks. I tell this for fear people might think I invented it.

Hill came in, and they prepared to go to the other house. David, his arms full—for, of course, with things to be carried, they did not go empty-handed—came suddenly back from the door in going out, flung his load down, and clasped his mother. She bent to kiss him.

“Good night, my dear one! Don’t you and Luke get chattering all night. Go to sleep betimes.”

He burst into tears, clinging to her with trembling sobs. It was as if his heart were breaking.

“Are you afraid to go?” she whispered.

“I must go,” was his sobbing answer.

“Now then, Davvy!” called back Hill’s rough tones. “What the plague are you lagging for?”

“Say good-bye to me, mother! Say good-bye!”

“Good-bye, and God bless you, David! Remember the angels are around you!”

“I know; I know!”

Catching up his bundles, he departed, keeping some paces behind Hill all the way; partly to hide his face, down which the tears were raining; partly in his customary awe of that formidable functionary who stood to him as a step-father.

Arrived at the house, Hill was fumbling for the key, when some one came darting forth from under the shadow of its eaves. It proved to be Luke Macintosh.

"I was a-looking round for you," said crusty Hill. "I began to think you'd forgot the time o' meeting."

"No, I'd not forgot it; but I be come to say that I can't oblige you by sleeping there," was Luke's reply. "The master have ordered me off with the waggon afore dawn, and so—I'm a-going to sleep at home."

Had I been there, I could have said the master had *not* ordered Luke off before dawn; but after his breakfast. It was just a ruse of his, to avoid doing what he had never relished, the sleeping in the house. Hill suspected as much, and went on at him, mockingly asking if he was afraid to see a hobgoblin. Luke dodged away in the midst of it, and Hill relieved his passion by a little hot language.

"Come along, Davvy," said he at last; "we must put these here things inside."

Unlocking the door, he went in; and, the first thing, fell against something or other in the darkness. Hill swore a little at that, and struck a light, the fire having gone out. This lower room was full of articles, thrown down out of hand; for the putting things straight was left to the morrow.

"Carry the match afore me, Davvy. These blankets must go up-stairs."

By some oversight no candles had been taken to the house; only the box of matches. David lighted one match after the other, while Hill

arranged the blankets on the mattress for sleeping. This room—the one that had the sky-light—was to be David's.

"There," said Hill, taking the box of matches from him, "you'll be comfortable here till morning. If you find it cold, you might keep on you trousers."

David Garth stood speechless, a look of horror struggling to his face. In that first moment he dared not remonstrate; his awe of Hill was too great.

"What's the matter now?" asked Hill, striking another match. "What ails you?"

"You'll not leave me here, all by myself?" whispered the unhappy boy, in desperate courage.

"Not leave you here by yourself! Why, what d'ye think is to harm you? Don't you try on your nonsense and your games with me, Master Davvy. I'm not soft, like your mother. Say your prayers and get to sleep, and I'll come and let you out in the morning."

By a dexterous movement, Hill got outside, and closed the door softly, slipping the bolt. The match in his fingers was nearly spent; but, nevertheless, it had shown a last faint vision of a boy kneeling in supplication, his hands held out, his face one of piteous agony. As Hill struck another match to light up the staircase, a wailing cry mingled with the sound: entreaties to be let out; prayers not to be left alone; low moans, telling of awful terror.

"Drat the boy! This comes of his mother's coddling. Hold your row, Davvy," he roared out, wrathfully: "you'd not like me to come back and give you a basting."

And Mr. James Hill, picking his way over the bundles, locked the outer door, and betook himself home. That was our respectable bailiff. What do you think of him?

"Did you leave Davy comfortable?" asked Mrs. Hill, when he got back.

"He'll be comfortable enough when he's asleep," shortly answered Hill. "Of all hardened, ungrateful boys, that of yours is the worst."

"Had Luke come when you got there?" she resumed, passing over the aspersion on Davy.

"He was waiting: he came right out upon us like an apparition," was Hill's evasive answer. And he did not tell the rest.

But now, a singular thing happened that night. Mrs. Hill was in a sound sleep, when a loud, agonised cry of "Mother" aroused her from it. She started up, wide awake instantly, and in terror so great that the perspiration began to pour off her face. In that moment the call was repeated again. The voice was David's voice; it had appeared to be in the room, close to her, and she peered into every corner in vain. Then she supposed it must have come through the window; that David,

from some cause or other, had come home from Willow Brook, and was waiting to be let in. A dread crossed her of Hill's anger, and she felt inclined to order the boy to go back again.

Opening the casement window, she called to him by name ; softly at first, and then louder. There was no answer. Mrs. Hill stretched out her head as far as the narrow casement allowed, but neither David nor anybody else could she see ; nothing but the shadows cast by the moonlight. Just then the old church clock struck out. She counted the strokes, and found it twelve. Midnight. It was bitterly cold : she closed the window at last, concluding David had gone off for fear of being punished. All she could hope was that he would have the sense, that dangerously keen night, to run off to the brick kilns, and get warmth there.

But the mortal terror lay upon her yet ; she was unable to tell why or wherefore ; unless from the strangely appealing agony contained in the cry ; still less could she shake it off. It seemed odd. Hill awoke with the commotion, and found her shaking.

"What have ye got to be affrighted on ?" he asked roughly, when she had told her tale. And Mrs. Hill was puzzled to say what.

"You had been a-dreaming of him, that's what it was. You've got nothing else in your mind, day nor night, but that there boy."

"It was not a dream ; I am quite positive

it was himself ; I could not mistake his voice," persisted Mrs. Hill. " He has come away from the cottage, for sure. Perhaps that Luke Macintosh might have got teasing him."

Knowing what Hill knew, that the boy was locked in, he might safely have stood out that he could not have come away from it ; but he said no more. Rolling himself round, he prepared to go to sleep again, resentful at having been woken up.

Hill overslept himself in the morning ; possibly through the interruption to his rest. When he went out it was broad daylight. David Garth's being locked up half an hour more or less went for nothing with Hill, and he stayed to load the truck with some of the remainder of his goods.

" Send Davy home at once, James," called out the wife, as he began to wheel it away. " I'll give him his breakfast and let him start off to the train."

For, with the daylight, and the sight of the door-key, Mrs. Hill could only reverse her opinion, and conclude unwillingly that it might have been a dream. Hill showed her the key, telling her that he had locked the door " for safety." Therefore, it appeared to be an impossibility that David could have got out.

The first thing Hill saw when he and his truck approached the cottage, was young Jim Batley, mounted on the roof and hammering

away at the skylight with his freezing hands. Jim, a regular sailor for climbing, had climbed a tree and thence swung himself on the tiles. Hill treated him to some hard words, and ordered him to come down and get a licking. Down came Jim ; taking care to dodge out of Hill's reach.

"I can't make David hear," said Jim. "I've got to go to Timberdale, and I want him to go along with me."

"That's no reason why you should get atop of my roof," roared Hill. "You look out for a sweet hiding, young Jim. The first time I get hold on you, you shall have it kindly."

"He sleeps uncommon hard," said Jim. "One 'ud think the cold had froze him. I've got to take a letter to my uncle's at Timberdale : we shall find a jolly good hot breakfast when we get there."

Hill condescended to abate his anger so far as to inform Jim Batley that David could not go to Timberdale ; adding that he was going off by train to see his grandmother at Worcester. Ordering Jim to take himself away, he unlocked the door and entered the cottage.

Jim Batley chose to stay. He was a tall, thin, obstinate fellow of eleven, and meant to wait and speak to David. Given to follow his own way whenever he could, in spite of his father and mother, it occurred to him that

perhaps David might be persuaded to take Timberdale first and the train after.

He amused himself amid the dead leaves while he waited. But it seemed that David took a long while dressing himself. The truck stood at the door; Jim stamped and whistled; and shied a few stones at the topmost article, which was Mrs. Hill's potato saucepan. Presently Hill came out and began to unload; beginning with the saucepan.

"Where's Davy?" demanded Jim, from a safe distance. "Ain't he ready yet?"

"Now if you don't get off about your business I'll make you go," was Hill's answer, keeping his back turned to the boy. "You haven't got nothing to stop for here."

"I'm stopping to speak to Davy."

"Davy was away out o' here afore daylight and took the first train to Worcester. He's there a'most by now."

Young boys are not clever reasoners: but certain odds and ends of contradictions passed through Jim's disappointed mind. For one thing, he had seen Hill unlock the door.

"I don't think he's gone out yet. I see his boots."

"What boots?" asked Hill, putting a bandbox inside the door.

"Davy's. I see 'em through the skylight; they stood near the tail of the mattress."

"Them was a pair of my boots as I carried

here last night. I tell ye Davvy's *gone* : can't ye believe ? He won't be home for some days neither, for his grandmother's safe to keep him."

Jim Batley went slowly off on his way to Timberdale : there was nothing to stay for, Davy being gone. Happening to turn round, he caught Hill looking after him, and saw his face for the first time. It had turned as white as death. The contrast was very remarkable, from its being usually of a deep red.

" Well, I never !" cried Jim, halting in surprise. " Mayhap the cold have took him ! Serve him right."

When Hill had got all the things inside he locked himself in, probably not to be disturbed while he arranged them. Mrs. Hill had been waiting breakfast ever so long when she heard the truck coming back.

" Whatever's become of David ?" she began. " I expected him home at once."

" David has started for Worcester," said Hill.

" Started for Worcester ! Without his breakfast ?"

" Now don't you worry yourself about petty things," returned Hill, crustily. " You wanted him to go, and he's gone. He won't starve ; let him alone for that."

The notion assumed by Mrs. Hill was, that her husband had started the boy off from the cottage direct to the train. She felt thoroughly vexed.

"He had all his old clothes on, Hill. I would not have had him go to Worcester in that plight for any money. You might have let the child come home for a bit of breakfast—and to dress himself. There was not so much as a brush and comb at the place, to brush his hair tidy."

"There's no pleasing you," growled Hill. "Last night you were a'most in a tantrum o' crying, cause Davvy couldn't be let go over to see your mother; and, now that he is gone, *that* don't please ye! Women be the very deuce for grumbling."

Mrs. Hill dropped the subject—there could be no remedy—and gave her husband his breakfast in silence. Hill seemed to eat nothing, and looked very pale; at moments ghastly.

"Don't you feel well?" she asked.

"Well?—I'm well enough. What should ail me—barring the cold? It's as sharp a frost as ever I was out in."

"Drink this," she said, pouring him out another cup of hot tea. "It is cold; and I'm sorry we've got it so for our moving. What time shall we get in to-day, Hill?"

"Not at all."

"Not at all!" repeated the wife in surprise.

"No, not at all," was Hill's surly confirmation. "What with you disabled, and Davvy

o' no use, things is not as forrad as they ought to be. I've got to be off to my work too, pretty quick, or the Squire'll be about me. We shan't get in till to-morrow."

"But nearly all our things are in," she remonstrated. "There's as good as nothing left here."

"I tell ye we don't go in afore to-morrow," said Hill, giving the table a thump. "Can't ye be satisfied with that?"

He went off to his work. Mrs. Hill, accepting the change as inevitable, resigned herself to it, and borrowed a saucepan to cook the potatoes for dinner. She might have spared herself the trouble; since her husband did not come in for any. He bought a penny loaf and some cheese, and made his dinner of it inside our home barn, Molly giving him some beer. He had done it before when very busy: but the work he was about that day was in no such hurry, and he might have left it if he would.

"Who is to sleep in the house to-night?" his wife asked him when he got home to tea.

"I shall," said Hill. "I won't be beholden to nobody."

Mrs. Hill, remembering the experience of the past night, quaked a little at finding she should have to sleep in the old place alone, devoutly praying there might be no recurrence of the dream that had put her into such mortal terror. She and Davy were just alike—

frightened at their own shadows in the dark. When Hill was safe off, she hurried into bed, and kept her head under the clothes.

Hill came back betimes in the morning ; and they moved in at once ; old Coney's groom, who happened to be out with the dog-cart, offering to drive Mrs. Hill. Though her ankle was better and the distance short, she could hardly have walked. Instead of finding the house in order, as she expected, it was at sixes and sevens ; the things lying about all over it.

Towards evening, Hannah got me to call at Willow Brook and say she'd go there in the morning for an hour or two, to help put things in order—the mistress had said she might. The fact was, Hannah was burning for the gossip : she and Hill's wife being choice friends. It was nearly dark ; the front room looked tolerably straight, and Mrs. Hill sat by the fire, resting her foot and looking out at the window, the shutters not yet shut.

"I'd be very thankful for her to come, Master Johnny," she said eagerly, hardly letting me finish. "There's a great deal to do ; and, besides that, it is so lonesome here. I never felt such a feeling in all my life ; and I have gone into strange homes before this."

"It does seem lonesome, somehow. The fancy may go off in a day or two."

"I don't know, sir : it's to be hoped it will.

Master Johnny, as true as that we are sitting here, when I got out of Mr. Coney's dog-cart and put my foot over the threshold to enter, a fit of tremor took me all over. There was no cause for it : I mean I was not thinking of anything to give it me. Not a minute before, I was laughing ; for the man had been telling me a joking story of something that happened yesterday at his master's. A strange fear seemed to come upon me all at once as I stepped over the threshold, and I began to shake from head to foot. Hill stared at me, and at last asked if it was the cold ; I told him truly that I did not know what it was ; except that it seemed like some unaccountable attack, for I was well wrapped up. He had some brandy in a bottle, and he made me drink a drop. The shaking fit went off ; but I have had a queer lonesome feeling on me ever since, as if the house was not one to be alone in."

" And you have been alone, I suppose ? "

" Every bit of the time, save when Hill came in to his dinner. I don't remember ever to have had such a feeling before in the broad daylight. It's just as if the house was haunted."

Not believing in haunted houses, I laughed. Mrs. Hill got up to stir the fire ; it blazed, and cast her shadow upon the opposite yellow-washed wall.

"When dusk came on, I could hardly bear it. But for your coming in, Master Johnny, I should have stood at the door in the cold, and watched for Hill: things don't feel so lonely to one out of doors as in."

So it seemed that I was in for a stay—any way, till Hill arrived. After this, it would not have been over kind to leave her to herself; she looked so weak and little.

"I've never liked the thought of moving here from the first," she went on; "and then there came the accident to my foot. Some people think nothing at all of omens, Master Johnny, but I do think of them. They come oftener than is thought for too; only, so few take notice of them. I wish Davy was back! I can't bear to be in this house alone."

"David is at Worcester, I heard Hill say."

"He went yesterday morning, sir. I expected a letter from him to day; and it is very curious that none has come. Davy knew how anxious I was about mother; and he never fails to write when he's away from me. Somehow, all things are going crooked and cross just now. I had a fright the night before last, Master Johnny, and I am hardly quit of it yet."

"What was that?" I asked her.

She stared into the fire for a minute or two

before she answered me. There was no other light in the room ; I sat back against the wall beside the window—whose shutters were still open.

“ You might not care to hear it, sir.”

“ I should if it's worth telling.”

Turning from the fire, she looked straight at me while she told it—told it from the beginning to the end, exactly as I have written it above. The tale would have been just the thing for Mrs. Todhetley ; who went in for most kinds of marvels.

“ Hill stood to it that it was a dream, Master Johnny ; but the more I think of it, the less I believe it could have been one. If I had only heard the call in my sleep, or in the moment of waking, why of course it might have been a dream ; but when I heard it the second time it was *after* I awoke. I heard it as plain as I hear my own voice now ; and plainer, too.”

“ But what else, except a dream, do you fancy it could have been ? ”

“ Well, sir, that's what is puzzling me. But for Hill's convincing me Davy could not have got out of here after he had locked him and Macintosh in for safety, I should have said it was the boy himself, calling me from outside. It sounded to be in the room, close to me : but the fright I was in might have deceived me—What's that ? ”

A loud rapping at the window had caused the climax. I am not ashamed to say that it startled me, coming so unexpectedly. Mrs. Hill with a shrill scream, darted forward to catch hold of my arm.

"Let me go. Somebody wants to be let in. I daresay it's Hill."

"Master Johnny, I beg your pardon," she said, falling back. "Hill ought to know better than to come frightening me at night like this."

I opened the door, and Miss Timmens walked in: not Hill. The knocking had not been intended to frighten anybody, but as a greeting to Mrs. Hill—Miss Timmens having seen her through the glass.

"You know you always were one of the quaking ones, Nanny," she said, scoffing at the alarm. "I have just got back from Worcester, and thought you'd like to hear that mother's better."

"And it is well you are back, Miss Timmens," I put in. "The school has been in chronic rebellion. Strangers, going by, have taken it for a bear garden."

"That Maria Lease is just good for nothing," said Miss Timmens, wrathfully. "When she offered to take my place I knew she'd not be of much use. Yes, sir; it was the thought of the school that brought me back so soon."

"And mother is really better!" cried Mrs. Hill. "I am so thankful. If she had died

and I not able to get over to her, I should never have forgiven myself. How is David?"

"Are you getting straight, Nancy?" asked Miss Timmens, looking round the room, and not noticing the question about David.

"Straight! and only moved in this morning! and me with this ankle!"

Miss Timmens laughed. She was just as capable as her sister was the contrary.

"About David?" added Mrs. Hill, "I was so vexed that he went over in his old clothes! It was Hill's fault. Have you brought me a letter from him?"

"How could I bring you a letter from him?" returned Miss Timmens. "A letter from where?"

It was a minute or two before the elucidation came, for both were at cross-purposes. David Garth had not been at Worcester at all, so far as Miss Timmens knew; certainly not at his grandmother's.

To see Mrs. Hill sink back into her chair at this information, and let her hands fall on her lap, and gaze helplessly from her frightened eyes, was only to be expected. Miss Timmens kept asking what it all meant, and where David was, but she could not get an answer. So I told her what Mother Hill had just told me—about Hill's sending him off to Worcester. She stared like anything.

"Why where in the name of wonder can the boy have got to?"

"I see it all," spoke the mother then, in a whisper. "Davy did find his way out of this house; and it was his voice I heard, and not a dream. I knew it. I knew it at the time."

These words would have sounded rather mysterious to any one given to mystery. Miss Timmens was not. She was a long, thin female, with chronic spots of redness on her nose and one cheek, and as practical as could be. Demanding what Mrs. Hill meant by "not a dream," she stood warming her boots at the fire while she was enlightened.

"The boy is keeping away for fear of Hill's tanning him," spoke Miss Timmens, summing up the question. "Don't you think so, Master Ludlow?"

"I should, if I could see how he got out of the cottage here, after Hill had locked him in it."

"Luke Macintosh put him out at this window," said Miss Timmens, decisively. "Hill couldn't lock up that. They'd open the shutters, and Luke would pop him out: to get rid of the boy, no doubt. Mr. Luke ought to be punished for it."

I did not contradict her. Of course it might have been so; but knowing Luke, I did not think he would care to be left in the house alone. Unless—the thought flashed over me—unless Luke sent away David that he might be off himself. Amidst a good deal of mist, this view seemed the most probable.

"Where is David?" bemoaned Mrs. Hill, "where is he? And with these bitter cold nights ——"

"Now don't you worry yourself, Nanny," interrupted strong-minded Miss Timmens. "I'll see to David; and bring him home, too."

Hill's cough was heard outside. Miss Timmens—who had been in a dead rage at the marriage, and consequently hated Hill like poison—hastened to depart. We went away together, passing Hill by the dried brook. He looked stealthily at us, and answered back a surly good-night to me.

"I'm sure I don't know where I am to look for the boy first," began Miss Timmens, as we went along. "Poor fellow! he is keeping away out of fear. It would not surprise me if Macintosh is taking care of him. The man's not ill-natured."

"I don't understand why Hill should have told his mother David was gone to Worcester, unless he did go." Neither did I.

"David never went to Worcester; rely upon that, Master Ludlow," was her decisive answer. "He is well known at Shrub Hill Station, and I could not have failed to hear of it, for one of the porters lodges in mother's house; besides, David would have come down to us at once. Good night, sir. I daresay he will turn up before to-morrow."

She went on towards the school-house, I the

other way to Crabb Cot. Mrs. Todhetley and the Squire were talking together by the blaze of fire, waiting until old Thomas came to announce dinner.

"Where have you been lingering this cold evening, Johnny?" began the Squire. "Don't you get trying the ponds, sir; the ice is not of more than wafer thickness."

Kneeling down on the rug between them, to hold my hands to the warmth, I told where I had been, and what I had heard. Mrs. Todhetley, who seemed to have been born with a sympathy for children, went into a lamentation over—it was what she said—that poor little gentle lamb, David.

"Macintosh is about somewhere," spoke the Squire, ringing the bell. "We will soon hear whether he knows what has become of the boy."

Thomas was ordered to find Macintosh and send him in. He came presently, shy and sheepish, as usual; standing just inside the door, he blinked his eyes and rubbed his hands one over the other, like any idiot. It was only his way.

"Do you know where David Garth is?" began the Squire, who thought himself a regular Q.C. at cross-examination. Luke stared at the query, and said No. The fact was, he had not heard that David was missing.

"What time was it that you put him out of the window the night before last?"

Luke's eyes and mouth opened. He had no more idea what the Squire meant than the man in the moon.

"Don't stand there as if you were a born simpleton, but answer me," commanded the Squire. "When you and David Garth were put into Hill's new cottage to take care of the things for the night, how came you to let the boy out of it? Why did you do it? Upon what plea?"

"But I didn't do it, sir," said Luke.

"Now don't you stand there and say that to my face, Macintosh. It won't answer; for I know all about it. You put that poor shivering boy out at the window that you might be off yourself; that's about the English of it. Where did he go to?"

"But I couldn't do it, sir," was Luke's answer to this. "I was not in the place myself."

"You were not there yourself?"

"No, sir, I warn't. Knowing I should have to go off with the waggon pretty early, I went down and telled Hill that I should sleep at home."

"Do you mean to say you did not go into Hill's place at all?"

"No, sir, I didn't. I conclude Hill slept there hisself. I know nothing about it, for I don't happen to have come across Hill since. I've kept out of his way."

This was a new turn to the affair. Luke quitted the room, and there came a silence. Mrs. Todhetley touched me on the shoulder.

"Johnny!"

"Yes!" I said, wondering at the startled look in her eyes.

"I hope Hill did not put that poor child into the house alone! If so, no wonder that he made his escape from it."

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The matter could not rest. One talked, and another talked: and before noon next day it was known all over the place that David Garth had been put to sleep by himself in the empty cottage. Miss Timmens attacked Hill with her strong tongue, and told him it was enough to frighten the child to death. Hill was sullen. He would answer nothing; and all she could get out of him was, that it was no business of hers. In vain she demanded his grounds for saying the boy had gone to Worcester by the early train: whether he sent him—whether he saw him off? Hill said David did go; and then took refuge in dogged silence.

The schoolmistress was not one to be played with. Of a tenacious turn, she followed out things with a will. She called in the police; she harangued people outside her door; she set the parish in a ferment. But David could not be heard of, high or low. Since the mid-

night hour, when that call of his awoke his mother, and was again repeated, he seemed to have vanished.

There arose a rumour that Jim Batley could tell something. Miss Timmens pounced upon him as he was going by the school-house, conveyed him indoors, and ordered him to make a clean breast of it. It was not much that Jim had to tell : but that little seemed of importance to Miss Timmens, and he told it readily. One thing Jim persisted in—that the boots he saw through the skylight must have been David's boots. Hill had called them his, he said, but they were not big enough—not men's boots at all. Hill was looking “ghastly white,” as if he had got a fright, Jim added, when he told him David was gone off to Worcester.

Perhaps it was in that moment that a fear, of something worse than had been suspected yet, dawned upon Miss Timmens. Tying on her bonnet, she came up to Crabb Cot, and asked to see the Squire.

“It is getting more serious,” she said, after old Thomas had shown her in. “I think, sir, Hill should be forced to explain what he knows. I have come here to ask you to insist upon it.”

“The question is—what does he know?” rejoined the Squire.

“More than he has confessed,” said Miss Timmens, in her positive manner. “Jim Batley stands to it that those boots must, from

the size, have been David's boots. Now, Squire Todhetley, if David's boots were there, where was David? That is what's lying on my mind, sir."

"What did Jim Batley see besides the boots?" asked the Squire.

"Nothing in particular," she answered. "He said the cupboard door stood open, and hid the best part of the room. David would not be likely to run away and leave his boots behind him."

"Unless he was in too great a fright to stop and put them on."

"I don't think that, sir."

"What is it you wish to imply?" asked the Squire, not seeing the drift of the argument.

"I wish I knew myself," replied Miss Timmens, candidly. "I am certain Hill has not told all he could tell: he has been deceitful over it from the first, and he must be made to explain. Look here, sir: when he got to Willow Cottage that morning, there's no doubt he thought David was in it. Very well. He goes in to call him; stays a bit, and then comes out and tells young Jim that David had gone to Worcester. How was he to know David had gone to Worcester?—who told him? The boy says, too, that Hill looked ghastly, as if he had been frightened."

"David must have gone somewhere, or he would have been in the room," argued the

Squire. "He would not be likely to go back after quitting it, and his mother heard him call to her in the middle of the night."

"Just so, sir. But—if Hill did not find him, why should he come out and assert that David had started for Worcester?—Why not have said David had escaped?"

"I am sure I don't know."

"It's the boots that come over me," avowed Miss Timmens; "I can't come to the bottom of them. I mean to come to the bottom of Hill, though, and make him disclose what he knows. You are his master, sir, and perhaps he will tell you without trouble, if you will please to be so good as question him. If he won't, I'll have him brought up before the Bench."

Away went Miss Timmens, with a parting remark that the school must be rampant by that time. The Squire sat thinking a bit, and then put on his hat and great-coat, telling me I might come with him and hear what Hill had to say. We expected to find Hill in the ploughed field between his cottage and North Crabb. But Hill was in his own garden; we saw him as we went along. Without ceremony, the Squire opened the wooden gate, and stepped in. Hill was raking the leaves together by the shed at the end of the garden.

He threw down the rake when he saw us, as if startled, his red face turning to white.

Coming forward, he began a confused excuse for being at home at that hour of the day, saying there was so much to do when getting into a fresh place; and that he had not been well for two days, had "had a sickness upon him." The Squire, never hard with the men, told him he was welcome to be there, and began talking about the garden.

"It is as rich a bit of land, Hill, as any in the parish, and you may turn it to good account if you are industrious. Does your wife intend to keep chickens?"

"Well, sir, I suppose she will. The town-bred women don't understand far about 'em, though. It may be a'most as much loss as profit."

"Nonsense," said the Squire, in his quick way. "Loss! when you have every convenience about you! This used to be the fowl-house in Hopton's time," he added, rapping the side of the shed with his stick. "Why! you've been putting a padlock on it, Hill!"

For the door was fastened with a padlock; a new one, to judge by its brightness. Hill made no comment. He had taken up the rake again and was raking vigorously at the dead leaves. I wondered what he was shaking for.

"Have you any treasures here, that you should lock it up?"

"Only the watering can, sir, and a few o'

my garden tools," answered Hill. "There's a heap of loose characters about, and nothing's safe from 'em."

Putting his back against the shed, the Squire suddenly called on Hill to face him, and entered on the business he had come upon. "Where was David Garth? Did he, Hill, know anything about him?"

Hill had looked pale before; I said so; but that was nothing to the frightful whiteness that took him now. Ears, lips, neck; all turned the hue of the dead. The rake shook in his grasp; his teeth chattered.

"Come, Hill," said the Squire; "I see you have something to say."

But Hill protested he had nothing to say: except that the boy's absence puzzled him. The Squire put some home questions, upon the points spoken of by Miss Timmens, showing Hill that we knew all. He then told him he might take his choice; to answer, or go before the magistrates.

Apparently Hill saw the futility of holding out longer. His very aspect would have convicted him, as the Squire said: if he had committed murder, he could not have looked more guilty. Glancing shudderingly around on all sides, as though the air had phantoms in it, he whispered his version of the morning's work.

It was true that he *had* gone to the house expecting to find David in it; and it was true that

when he entered he found him flown. Not wishing alarm to get to the boy's mother, he told Jim Batley that David had gone by early train to Worcester : he told the mother so. As to the boots, Hill declared they were his own, not David's ; and that Jim's eyes must have been deceived in the size. And he vowed and declared he knew no more than this, or where David could have got to.

"What do you think you deserve for locking the child in the house by himself?" asked the Squire, sternly.

"Everything that'll come upon me through it," readily acknowledged Hill. "I could cut my hands off now for having done it ; but I never thought he'd be really frightened. It's just as if his ghost had been haunting me ever since ; I see him a-following of me everywhere."

"His ghost!" exclaimed the Squire. "Do you suppose he is dead?"

"I don't know," said the man, passing his shaking hand across his damp forehead. "I wish to heaven I had let him go off to his grandmother's that same blessed night!"

"Then you wish me to understand, Hill, that you absolutely know nothing of where the boy may be?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

"Don't you think it might have been as well if you had told the truth from the first?" asked the Squire, rather sarcastically.

"Well, sir, one's mind gets confused at times, and I thought of his mother. I could not be off seeing that if anything had happened, it lay on my shoulders for having left him alone, in there."

Whether the Squire believed Hill could tell more, I don't know. I did. As we went on to the school-house, the Pater kept silent. Miss Timmens was frightfully disappointed at the result, and said Hill was a shifty scoundrel.

"I cannot tell what to think," the Squire remarked to her. "His manner is the strangest I ever saw; it is just as though he had something on his conscience. He said the boy's ghost seemed to haunt him. Did you notice that, Johnny?"

"Yes, sir. A queer idea."

"He—he—never could have found David dead in the morning?" cried Miss Timmens, in a low tone, herself turning a little pale.  
"Dead of fright?"

"That could not be," said the Squire. "You forget that David had made his escape before midnight, and was at his mother's, calling to her."

"True, true," assented Miss Timmens. "Any way, I am certain Hill is somehow or other deceiving us, and he is a born villain for it."

But Hill, deceiving us though he had been, could not hold out. In going back, we saw him leaning over the palings waiting for us.

But that the man is living yet, I should have said he was going to die there and then, for he looked exactly like it.

It seemed that just after we quitted him, a policeman had made his appearance. Not as a policeman, but as a friend; for he and Hill were cronies. He told Hill confidentially that there was "going to be a row over that there lost boy; that folks were saying that he might have been murdered; that unless Hill could tell something satisfactory about him, he and others might be in custody before the day was over." Whether Hill found himself brought to a point from which there was neither advance nor retreat, or that he saw inevitably the concealment could no longer be maintained, or that he was stricken to despair and felt helpless, I know not. There he stood, with his head over the palings, saying he would tell all.

It was a sad tale to listen to. Miss Timmens's last supposition was right—Hill, upon going up to release David Garth, had found him dead. And, so far as the man's experience of death went, he must have been dead for six or seven hours.

"I'd like you to come and see him, sir," panted Hill.

Gingerly stepped the Squire in Hill's wake across the garden to the shed. Unlocking the door, Hill stepped back for us to enter. On a mattress on the ground was David, laid straight

in his every-day clothes, and covered with a blanket ; his pretty hair, which his mother had loved so, smoothed carefully. Hill,—rough, burly, cross-grained Hill,—burst into tears and sobbed like a child.

“I'd give my life to undo it, and bring him to again, Squire ; I'd give my life twice over, Master Johnny ; but I declare before Heaven, I never thought to harm the boy. When I see him the next morning, lying dead, I'd not have minded if the Lord had struck me dead too. I've been a'most mad ever since.”

“Johnny,” said the Squire, in a low tone, “go you to South Crabb, and bring over Mr. Cole. Do not talk of this.”

The surgeon was at home, and came back with me. I did not quite understand why the Squire sent for him, seeing he could do no good.

And the boots were David's, after all ; the only things he had taken off. Hill had brought him to this shed the next night ; with some vague idea of burying him in the ground under the leaves. “But I couldn't do it,” he avowed amid his sobs, “I couldn't do it.”

There was an examination : Cole and another making it ; and they gave evidence at the inquest. One of them (it was Cole) thought the boy must have died from fright, the other from the cold ; and a nice muff this last must have been.

"I did not from the first like that midnight call, or the apparently causeless terror the poor mother woke up in," said Mrs. Todhetley, to me. "The child's spirit must have cried to her in his death-agony. I have known a case like this before."

"But——"

"Hold your tongue, Johnny. You have not lived long enough to get experience of these things."

And I held it.

## XX.

## DAVID GARTH'S GHOST.

"*I*s it true that she's going to marry him, Miss Timmens?"

"True! *I* don't know," retorted Miss Timmens, in wrath. "It won't be for the lack of warning, if she does. I told her so last night; and she tossed her head in answer. She's a vain, heartless girl, Hannah Baber, with no more proper prudence about her than a female ostrich."

"There may be nothing in it, after all," said Hannah. "She is generally ready to flirt, you know."

"Flirt!" shrieked Miss Timmens in her shrillest tone. "She'd flirt with a two-legged wheelbarrow if it had trousers on."

This colloquy was taking place at the private door of the school-house. And you must understand that we have gone back a few months, for at this time David Garth was not dead. Hannah, who had gone down from Crabb Cot on an errand, came upon Miss Timmens standing there to look out. Of course she stayed to gossip.

The object of Miss Timmens's wrath was

her niece, Harriet Roe. A vain, showy, handsome, free-natured girl, as you have heard, with bright dark eyes and white teeth—who had helped to work that mischief between Maria Lease and Daniel Ferrar, which had led to Ferrar's dreadful death. Humphrey Roe, Harriet's father, was the half brother of Miss Timmens and Mrs. Hill ; he had settled in France, and married a French woman. Miss Harriet chose to call herself French, and politely said the English were not fit to tie that nation's shoes. Perhaps that was why she had now taken up with a cousin, Louis Roe. Not that Louis Roe was really French : he had been born in France of English parents, and so was next door to it. A fashionable-looking young man North Crabb considered him, for he wore well-cut coats and had a moustache. A moustache was a thing to be stared at in simple country places then. It may have had something to do with Miss Timmens's dislike of the young man. Louis Roe was but a distant relative: a tenth cousin, or so ; of whom Miss Timmens had heard before, but never seen. When he made his unexpected appearance one January day at the school-house (it was the January after Daniel Ferrar's death) ostensibly to see Harriet, whom he had known in France, Miss Timmens, between surprise and the moustache, was less gracious than she might have been. From that time to this—March—he

had (as Miss Timmens put it) haunted the place, though chiefly taking up his abode at Worcester. Harriet had struck into a flirtation with him at once, after her native fashion : and now it was reported that they were going to be married. Miss Timmens could not find out that he was doing anything for a living. He talked of his fine "affaires" over in France : but when she questioned him of what nature the "affaires" were, he either evaded her like an eel, or gave rambling answers that she could make neither head nor tail of. The way in which he and Harriet would jabber French in her presence, not a sound of which language could she comprehend, and the laughing that went on at the same time, put up Miss Timmens's back worse than anything, for she thought they were making game of her. She could be tart when she pleased ; and when that happened, the chronic redness in the nose and one cheek grew redder. Very tart indeed was she, recounting these grievances to Hannah.

" My firm belief, Hannah Baber, is, that he wants to get hold of Harriet for her two hundred pounds. She has that much, you know : it came to her from her mother. Roe would rather play the gentleman than work. It is the money he's after, not Harriet."

" The money may put him into some good way of business, and they may live comfortably together," suggested Hannah.

"Cats may fly," returned Miss Timmens. "There's something in that young man, Hannah Baber, that I could not trust. Oh, but girls are wilful!—and simple, at the best, where the men are concerned! They can't see an inch beyond their noses: no, nor they won't let others, who have sight, see for them. Look there!"

Emerging into the spring sunshine from the shade of the withy walk, came the gentleman in question; Harriet Roe in her gay ribbons at his side. Miss Timmens gave her door a bang, regardless of good manners, and Hannah pursued her way.

The road being thus paved for it, North Crabb church was not taken by surprise when it heard the marriage banns read out one Sunday morning between Louis Roe, of the parish of St. Swithin, Worcester (it was where he was staying at the time), and Henriette Adèle Marie Roe. Miss Timmens, who had not been taken into confidence, started violently; Mademoiselle Henriette Adèle Marie, sitting by her side, held up her head and her blooming cheeks with unruffled equanimity. It was said there was a scene when they got home: Miss Timmens's sister (once Mrs. Garth, but then our bailiff's wife, James Hill) looking in at the school-house to assist at it. Neither of them could make anything of Harriet.

"I'll tell you what it is, Aunt Susan and Aunt Nancy," said the girl passionately, when her temper got high, "*my mind is made up to marry Louis*; and if you don't drop this magging now and for good; if you attempt to worry me any further, I'll go off to Worcester, and stay with him till the day comes. There! how would you like that? I will, I declare. It would be thought nothing at all of in my country, with the wedding so near."

This shut them up. Mrs. Hill, a meek, gentle little woman, who had her sorrows, and habitually let Miss Timmens do all the talking when they were together, began to cry. Harriet eat her cold dinner standing, and went off for an afternoon promenade with Monsieur Louis. From that time, even Miss Timmens gave up all hope of opposition, seeing that events must take their course. Harriet's parents were dead; she was over age, and her own mistress in the eye of the law.

"Would you mind taking a turn with me in the withy walk, Harriet Roe?" asked Maria Lease, as they were coming out of church that same night.

Harriet was alone. Louis Roe had gone back to Worcester. The request surprised her considerably. Since Daniel Ferrar's death the past November, Maria had been very distant with her; averting her head if they happened to meet.

"So you have come to your senses, have you, Maria Lease?" was the half-insolent, half-goodnatured answer. "I'll walk down it with you if you like."

"Come to my senses in what way?" asked Maria, in a low, subdued, sad tone, as they went towards the withy walk.

"About—you know what. You blamed *me* for what happened. As good as laid his death at my door."

"Did you ever hear me say I did?"

"Oh, I could see: your manner was enough. As if I either helped it on—or could have prevented it! We used to have just a bit of talking and laughing together, he and I, but that was all."

That all! And the gold chain was still on Harriet's neck. Maria suppressed a sigh.

"Whether I blamed you for it, Harriet Roe, or whether I blamed myself, is of no moment now. The past can never be recalled or redeemed in this world—its remembrance alone remains. I want to do you a little service, Harriet: nothing may come of it, but it is my duty to speak."

Amid the shadows of the withy beds, under the silent stars, Maria spoke, dropping her voice to a whisper. In a sufficiently curious but accidental manner, she had heard something said the previous week about Louis Roe. A stranger, who had known him in France, spoke

very much in his disfavour ; he said that any girl, if she cared for her future happiness and credit, would be mad to tie herself to him. Maria had asked no particulars ; they might not have been given if she had ; but the impression left on her mind of Louis Roe was not a good one. All this she quietly repeated to Harriet. It was received in anything but a friendly spirit.

"Thank you for nothing, Maria Lease. Because you lost your own husband—that was to have been—you think you'll try what you can do to deprive me of mine. A slice of revenge, I suppose : but it won't succeed."

"Harriet, you are mistaken," rejoined Maria ; and Miss Harriet thought she had never in her life heard so mournfully sad a tone as the words were spoken in. "So much self-reproach fell upon me that bitter evening when he was found hanging—and dead ; reproach that can never be lifted off me while time shall last, that I do not think I can ever again do an ill turn in this life, or give an unkind word. The whole world does not seem to be as sinful in its wickedness as I was in my harsh unkindness ; and there's no manner of expiation left for me. If I pass my whole existence laying my hands under other people's feet in humble hope to serve them, it cannot undo the bitter malice of my passion when I exposed him before Johnny Ludlow. The ex-

posure was more than he could bear ; and he —he put an end to it. I suffer always, Harriet Roe ; my days are one prolonged burning agony of repentance. Repentance that brings no relief."

" My goodness ! " cried Harriet, her breath nearly scared away at hearing this, careless-natured though she was. " I'll tell you what, Maria : I should turn Roman Catholic in your place ; and let a priest absolve me from the sin."

A priest absolve her from the sin ! The strange anguish on her compressed lips was visible as Maria Lease turned her face upwards in the starlight. ONE Most High and merciful Priest was ever there, who could, and would, wash out her sin. But—what of Daniel Ferrar, who had died in his ?

" If there is one person whom I would more especially seek to serve in kindness, it is you, Harriet," she resumed, putting her hand gently on Harriet's arm—and her fingers accidentally touched the gold chain that Daniel Ferrar had hung round the girl's neck in his perfidy. " Revenge !—from me ! "

" The very idea of my giving up Louis is absurd," was Harriet's rejoinder, as they came out of the withy walk. " Thank you all the same, Maria Lease ; and there's my hand. I see now that you meant kindly : but no one shall set me against my promised husband."

Maria shook the hand in silence.

"Look here, Maria—don't go and tell your beautiful scandal to sharp Susan Timmens. Not that I care whether you do or not, except on the score of contention. She would strike up fresh opposition, and it might come to scratching and fighting. My temper has borne enough: one can't be a lamb always."

The wedding came off on Easter Tuesday. Harriet wore a bright silk dress, the colour of lilac, with a wreath and veil on her head. When the latter ornaments came home, Miss Timmens nearly fainted. Decent young women in their station of life were married in bonnets, she represented: not in wreaths and veils. But Harriet Roe, reared in French customs, said bonnets could never be admissible for a bride, and that she'd sooner go to church in a coal-scuttle. The Batley girls, in trains and straw hats, were bridesmaids. Miss Timmens wore a new shawl and white gloves; and poor little David Garth—who was to die of fright before that same year came to an end—stood with his hand locked in his mother's.

And so, in the self-same church where she had sat displaying her graces before the ill-fated Daniel Ferrar, and by the same young clergyman who had preached to her then, Harriet became the wife of Louis Roe, and went away with him to London.

The next move in the chain of events was the death of David Garth in Willow Cottage. It occurred in November, when Tod and I were staying at home, and has been already told of. James Hill got off without punishment : it was said there was no law to touch him. He protested through thick and thin that he meant no harm to the boy ; to do him justice, it was not supposed he had : he was finely repentant for it, and escaped with a reprimand.

Mrs. Hill refused to stay in the cottage. What with her innate tendency to superstition, with the real facts of the case, and with that strange belief—that David's spirit had appeared to her in the moment of dying ; a belief firm and fixed as adamant—she passed into a state of chronic horror of the dwelling. Not another night could she remain in it. The doctor himself, Cole, said she must not. Miss Timmens took her in as a temporary thing ; until the furniture could be replaced in their former house, which was not let. Hill made no objection to this. For that matter, he seemed afraid of the new place himself, and was glad to get back to the old one. All his native surliness had left him for the time : he was as a subdued man whose tongue has gone away on an excursion. You see, he had feared the law might come down upon him. The coroner's inquest had brought in a safe verdict : all Hill got was a censure for having locked the

boy in alone : but he could not yet feel secure that the affair would not be taken up by the magistrates : and the parish said in his hearing that his punishment ought to be transportation at the very least. Altogether, it subdued him.

So, as soon as David's funeral was over, and while his wife was still with Miss Timmens, Hill began to move back his goods in a surly kind of humble silence. Crowds collected to see the transport, much to Hill's annoyance and discomfiture. The calamity had caused intense excitement in the place ; and Miss Timmens, who had a very long tongue, and hated Hill just as much as she had loved David, kept up the ball. Hill's intention was to lock up Willow Cottage until he could get Mr. Todhetley to release him from it. At present he dared not ask : all of us at Crabb Cot, from the Squire downwards, were bitter against him for his wicked inhumanity to poor David.

Curious to say—curious because of what was to happen out of it—as Hill was loading the truck with the last remaining things, a stranger came up to the door of the cottage. Just at the first moment, Hill did not recognize him ; for he had shaved off his moustache and whiskers, and grown a great beard instead. And that alters people.

“ How are you, Hill ? What are you up to here ? ”

It was Louis Roe—who had married Mademoiselle Henriette the previous Easter. Where they had been since, or what they had done, was a kind of mystery, for Harriet had written but one letter. By that letter, it was gathered that they were flourishing in grandeur in London : but no address was appended, and Miss Timmens had called her a heartless jade, not to want to hear from her best relatives.

Hill answered that he was pretty well, and went on loading ; but said nothing to the other question. Louis Roe—perceiving sundry straggling spectators, who stood peering at all points, as if the loading of a hand-barrow with goods were a raree-show—rather wondered at appearances, and asked again. Hill shortly explained then that they had moved into Willow Cottage ; but his wife found it didn't suit her, and so they were moving back again to the old home.

He went off at a tangent with the truck, before he had well answered, giving no time for further colloquy. Louis Roe happened to come across young Jim Batley amidst the tag-rag, and heard from him all that had occurred.

“ He must be a cruel-natured devil, to leave a timid child all night in a house alone ! ” was the indignant comment of Mr. Roe ; who, whatever his shortcomings might be in the eyes of Miss Timmens, was not thought to be hard-hearted.

"His mother, she see his ghost," went on Jim Batley. "Leastways, heered it."

Mr. Roe took no notice of this additional communication. Perhaps ghosts held a low place in his creed—and he appeared to have plunged into a reverie. Starting out of it in a minute or two, he ran after Hill, and began talking to him in a low, business tone.

Hill could not believe his ears. Surely such luck had never befallen a miserable man! For here was Louis Roe offering to take Willow Cottage off his hands: to become his, Hill's, tenant in it, for a short time. The double rent; this, and that for the old house he was moving back to; had been weighing down Hill's mind as heavily as David weighed it. The man had saved lots of money, but he was of a close nature. Squire Todhetley was a generous man; but Hill felt conscious that he had displeased him too much to expect any favour yet awhile.

"What d'ye want of the cottage?" asked Hill, suppressing all signs of satisfaction. "Be you and Harriet a coming to live down here?"

"We'd like to stay here for a few weeks—say till the dead of winter's over," replied Roe. "London is a beastly dull place in bad weather; the fogs don't agree with Harriet. I had thought of taking two or three rooms at Birmingham: but I don't know but she'll like

this cottage best—if you will let me have it cheap."

It would be cheap enough. For Hill named but the very moderate rent he had agreed to pay the Squire. Only too glad, was he, to get that. Roe promised to pay him monthly.

North Crabb was electrified at the news. Mr. and Mrs. Roe were coming to stay in the cottage where poor David Garth had just died. No time was lost over it, either. On the following day some hired furniture was put into it, and Harriet herself arrived.

She was looking very ill. And I'm sure if she had appeared in a beard as well as her husband her face could not have seemed more changed. Not her face only, but her manners. Instead of figuring off in silks and ribbons, finer than the stars, laughing with everybody she met, and throwing her handsome eyes about, she wore only plain things, and went along noticing nobody. Some of the people called it "pride"; Miss Timmens said it was disappointment. The first time Tod and I met her, she never lifted her eyes at all. Tod would have stayed to speak; but she just said, "Good morning, gentlemen," and whisked on.

"I say, Johnny, there's some change there," was Tod's remark, as he turned to look after her.

They had been in the place about a week—and Roe seemed to keep in-doors, or else

was away, for nobody ever saw him—when a strange turn arose, that was destined to set the neighbourhood in an uproar. I was running past the school-house one evening at dusk, and saw Maria Lease sitting with Miss Timmens by fire-light, the parlour shutters not being shut. Liking Maria very much—for I always did like her, and always shall—I went bolt in to them. James Hill's wife was also there, in her mourning gown with the crape on it, sitting right back in the chimney corner. She had gone back to Hill then, but made no scruple of leaving him alone often: and Hill, who had had his lesson, put up with it. And you would never guess; no, not though you had tried from then till midsummer; what it was they were whispering about, as though scared out of their seven senses.

David Garth's ghost was haunting Willow Cottage.

Miss Timmens was telling the story; the others listened with open mouths. She began at the beginning again for my benefit.

"I was sitting by myself here about this time last evening, Master Johnny, having dismissed the children, and almost too tired with their worry to get my own tea, when Harriet Roe came gliding in at the door, looking whiter than a sheet, and startling me beyond everything. 'Aunt Susan,' says she in so indistinct a tone that I should have boxed one of the

girls had she attempted to use such, ‘would you take pity on me and let me stay here till to-morrow morning? Louis went away this afternoon, and I dare not stop alone in the place all night.’ ‘What are you afraid of?’ I asked, not telling her at once that she might stay; but down she sat, and threw her mantle and bonnet off—taking French leave. I never saw *her* in such a state before,” continued Miss Timmens vehemently; “shivering and shaking as if she had an ague fit, and not a particle of her impudence left in her. ‘I think that place must be damp with the willow brook, aunt,’ says she; ‘it gives me a sensation of cold.’ ‘Now don’t you talk nonsense about your willow brooks, Harriet Roe,’ says I. ‘You are not a shaking for willow brooks, or for cold either, but from fright. What is it?’ ‘Well then,’ says she, plucking up a bit, and putting her hands across her knees to keep ‘em still, ‘I’m afraid of seeing the boy.’ ‘What boy?’ says I—‘not David?’ ‘Yes; David,’ she says, and trembles worse than ever. ‘He appeared to Aunt Nancy; a sign he is not at rest; and he is as sure to be in the house as sure can be. Dying in it in the way he did, and lying hid in the shed as he did, what else is to be expected?’ Well, Master Johnny, this all seemed to me very odd—as I’ve just observed to Nancy,” continued Miss Timmens. “It struck me, sir, there was more behind. ‘Harriet,’

says I, ‘have you *seen* David Garth?’ But at first no satisfactory answer could I get from her, neither yes nor no. At last she said she had not seen him, but knew she should if she stayed in the house by herself at night, for that he came again, and was *in* it. It struck me she was speaking falsely; and that she *had* seen him; or what she took for him.”

“I know she has; I feel convinced of it,” spoke up poor Mrs. Hill, tilting back her black bonnet—worn for David—to wipe the tears from her eyes. “Master Ludlow, don’t smile, sir—though it’s best perhaps for the young to disbelieve these solemn things. As surely as that we are talking here, my dear boy’s spirit came to me in the moment of his death. I feared it might take to haunt the cottage, sir; and that’s one reason why I could not stay in it.”

“Yes: Harriet has seen him,” interposed Maria Lease in a low, firm tone. “Just as I saw Daniel Ferrar. Master Johnny, *you* know I saw *him*.”

Well, truth to say, I thought she must have seen Daniel Ferrar. Having assisted at the sight—or if not at the actual sight, at the place and time and circumstance attending it—I did not see how else it was to be explained away.

“Where’s Harriet now?” I asked.

“She stayed here last night, and went off by rail this morning to her grandmother’s at Wor-

cester," replied Miss Timmens. "Mother will be glad of her for a day or so, for she keeps her bed still."

"Then who is in the cottage?"

"Nobody, sir. It's locked up. Roe is expected back to-morrow."

Miss Timmens began to set her tea-things, and I left them. Whom should I come upon in the road, but Tod—who had been over to South Crabb. I told him all this; and we took the broad path home through the fields, which led us past Willow Cottage. The fun Tod made of what the women had been saying, was beyond everything. A dreary dwelling, it looked; cold, and deserted, and solitary in the dusky night, on which the moon was rising. The back looked to Crabb Ravine; and towards the three-cornered grove in which Daniel Ferrar took his own life away; and to the barn where Maria had seen Ferrar after death. In front was the large field, bleak and bare; and, beyond, the scattered chimneys of North Crabb. A lively dwelling altogether!—let alone what had happened in it to David Garth. I said so.

"Yes, it is a lively spot!" acquiesced Tod. "Beautifully lively in itself, without getting the reputation of being haunted. Eugh! Let's get home to dinner, Johnny."

Mr. and Mrs. Coney and Tom came in after dinner. Old Coney and the Squire smoked till tea-time. When tea was over we all sat down

to Pope Joan. Mr. Coney kept mistaking hearts for diamonds, clubs for spades ; he had not got his spectacles, and I offered to fetch them. Upon that, he set upon Tom for being lazy and letting Johnny Ludlow do what it was his place to do. The result was, that Tom Coney and I had a race which should reach the farm first. The night was a bright one, the moon high. Coming back with the spectacles, a man encountered us, tearing along as fast as we were. And that was like mad.

“ Halloo ! ” cried Tom. “ What’s up ? ”

Tom had cause to ask it. The man was Luke Macintosh : and never in all my life had I seen a specimen of such intense terror. His hair was lank, his face white, his breath came in gasps. Without saying with your leave or by your leave, he caught hold of Tom Coney’s arm.

“ Master, as I be a living sinner, I ha’ just seen Davy Garth.”

“ Seen David Garth ! ” echoed Tom, wondering whether Luke had been drinking.

“ I see him as plain as plain. He be at that end window o’ the Willow Cottage.”

“ Do you mean his ghost, or himself ? ” asked Tom making game of it.

“ Why his ghost, in course, sir. It’s well known hisself be dead and buried—worse luck ! Mercy on us ! —I’d ha’ lost a month’s wages rather nor see this.”

Considering Luke Macintosh was so great a coward that he would not go through the Ravine after nightfall, this was not much from him. Neither had his conscience been quite easy since David's death: as it may be said that he, through refusing at the last moment to sleep in the house, had been in a degree the remote cause of it. His account was this: Passing the Willow Cottage on his way from North Crabb, he happened to look up at the end window, and saw David standing there all in white in the moonlight.

"I never see nothing plainer in all my born days, never," gasped Luke. "His poor little face hadn't got no more colour in it nor chalk. Drat them ghosts and goblins, then! What does they come and show theirselves to decent folk for?"

He was trembling just as Miss Timmens, some three hours before, had described Harriet Roe to have trembled. An idea flashed into my mind.

"Now, Luke, just you confess—who is it that has put this into your head?" I asked. But Luke only stared at me: he seemed not to understand.

"Somebody has been telling you this to-night at North Crabb."

"Telling me what Master Ludlow?" he jeered out.

"That David Garth is haunting the cottage.

It is what people are saying, Tom," I added to Coney.

"Then, Master Johnny, I never heered a blessed syllable on't," he replied; and so earnestly that it was not possible to disbelieve him. "Nobody have said nothing to me. For the matter o' that, I didn't stop to talk to a soul, but just put Molly's letter in the window slit,—which was what I went for—and turned back again. I wish the woman had ha' been skinned afore she'd got me to go off to the post for her to-night. Plague on me, to have took the way past the cottage!—as if the road warn't good enough to ha' served me!—and a sight straighter!"

"Were there lights in the cottage, Luke?" asked Coney. "Did you see the Roes about?"

"There warn't no more sign o' light or life a-nigh the place, Mr. Tom, no more nor if they'd all been dead and buried inside it."

"It is shut up, Tom," I said. "Roe and his wife are away."

"*Lawk* a mercy!—not a living creature in it but the ghost!" quaked Luke.

As I have said, this was not much from Luke, taking what he was into consideration; but it was to be confirmed by others. One of the Coneys' maidservants came along, as we stood there, on her way from North Crabb. A sensible, respectable woman, with no nonsense

about her in general ; but she looked nearly as scared as Luke now. .

“ You don’t mean to say *you* have seen it, Dinah ? ” cried Tom, staring at her.

“ Yes, I have, sir.”

“ What ! seen David Garth ? ”

“ Well, I suppose it was him. It was something at the window, in white, that looked like him, Mr. Tom.”

“ Did you go on purpose to look for it Dinah ? ” asked Tom ironically.

“ The way I happened to go was this, sir. James Hill overtook me coming out of North Crabb : he was going up to Willow Cottage to speak to Roe ; and I thought I’d walk with him, instead of taking the road. Not but what he’s a beauty to walk with, *he* is, after his cruelty to his wife’s boy,” broke off Dinah : “ but company is company on a solitary road at night. When we got to the cottage, Hill knocked ; I stayed a minute to say how d’ye do to Mrs. Roe, for I’ve not seen her yet. Nobody answered the door ; the place looked all dark and empty. ‘ They must be out for the evening, I should think,’ says Hill : and with that he steps back and looks up at the windows. ‘ Lord be good to us ! what’s that ? ’ says he, when he had got round where he could see the end casement. I went to him, and found him standing like a pump, just as stiff and upright, his hands clutched hold of one another, and his eyes

staring up at the panes in mortal terror. ‘What is it?’ says I. ‘It’s Davvy,’ says he; but the voice didn’t sound like Hill’s voice, and it scared me a bit. ‘Yes, it’s him,’ says Hill; ‘he have got on the sheet as was wrapped round him to carry him to the shed. I—I lodged him again that there window to make the turning; the stairs was awk’ard,’ went on Hill, as if he was speaking again the grain, but couldn’t help himself. And sure enough, Mr. Tom—sure enough Master Ludlow, there was David.”

“Nonsense, Dinah!” cried Tom Coney.

“I saw him quite well, sir, in the white sheet,” said Dinah. “The moon was shining on the window a’most as bright as day.”

“It were brighter nor day,” eagerly put in Luke Macintosh. “You’ll believe me now, Mr. Tom.”

“I’d not believe it if I saw it,” said Tom Coney.

“As we stood looking up, me laying hold of Hill’s arm,” resumed Dinah, as if she had not told all her tale, “there came a loud whistling and shouting behind. Which was young Jim Batley, bringing some message from them sisters of his to Harriet Roe. I bade him hush his noise, but he only danced and mocked at me; so then I told him the cottage was empty, except for David Garth. That hushed him. He came stealing up, and stood by me, staring.

You should have seen his face change, Mr. Tom."

"Was he frightened."

"Frightened is hardly the word for it, sir. His teeth began to chatter as if he'd got a fit; and down he went at last like a stone, face first, and howling fearful. We couldn't hardly get him up again to come away, me and Hill. And as to the ghost, Mr. Tom, it *was* still there."

"Well, it is a queer tale," acknowledged Tom Coney.

"We made for the road, all three of us then, and I turned on here—and I didn't half like coming by the barn where Maria Lease saw Daniel Ferrar," candidly added Dinah. "T'other two went on their opposite way, Jim never letting go of Hill's coat tails."

There was no more Pope Joan that night. We carried the story indoors; and I mentioned also what had been said at Miss Timmens's. The Squire and old Coney laughed.

With David Garth's ghost to be seen, it could not be supposed that I, or Tod, or Tom Coney, should stay away from the sight. When we reached the place, some twenty people had collected round the house. Jim Batley had told the tale in North Crabb.

But curious watchers had seen nothing. Neither did we. For the bright night had changed to one of darkness. A huge curtain of

cloud had come up from the south, covering the moon and the best part of the sky, as a pall covers a coffin. If gazing could have brought a ghost to the window, there would assuredly have been one. The casement was at the end of the house; serving to light the narrow upstairs passage. A huge cherry tree hid the casement in summer; in a slight degree its bare branches obscured it now.

A sound, as of some panting animal, grew up beside me as I leaned on the side palings. I turned; and saw the bailiff. Some dreadful power of fascination had brought him back again, contrary to his will.

"So it is gone, Hill, you see."

"It's not gone, Mr. Johnny," was his answer. "For some of our sights, it'll never go away again. You look well at the right hand side, sir, and see if you don't see some'at white there."

Peering steadily, I thought I did see something white—as of a face above a white garment. But it might have been fancy.

"Us as saw *him* couldn't mistake it for fancy," was Hill's rejoinder. "There was three on us: me, and Dinah up at Coney's, and that there imp of a Jim Batley."

"Somebody saw it before you did, Hill. At least he says so. Luke Macintosh. He was scared out of his senses."

The effect of these words on Hill was such,

that I quite believed he was scared out of *his*. He clasped his hands in wild emotion, and turned up his eyes to give thanks.

"It's ret'ribution a working out of its ends, Mr. Ludlow. See it first, did he ! And I hope to my heart he'll see it afore his eyes evermore. If that there Macintosh had not played a false and coward's game, no harm 'ud ha' come to Davvy."

The crowd increased. The Squire and old Coney came up : and told the whole assemblage that they were born idiots. Of course—with nothing to be seen—it looked as though we all were that. In the midst of it, making quietly for the back door, as though he had come home through Crabb Ravine from Timberdale, I espied Louis Roe. Saying nothing to anybody, I went round and told him.

"David Garth's ghost in the place !" he exclaimed. "Why it will frighten my wife to death. Of course there's nothing of the kind ; but women are so foolishly timid."

I said his wife was not there. Roe took a key from his pocket, unlocked the back door, and went in. He was talking to me, and I stepped over the threshold to the kitchen, into which the door opened. He began feeling on the shelf for matches, and could not find any.

"There's a box in the bedroom I know," he said ; and went stumbling upstairs.

Down he came, after a minute or so, with

the matches, struck one, and lighted a candle. Opening the front door, he showed himself, explained that he had just come home, and complained of the commotion.

"There's no such thing in this lower world as ghosts," says Roe. "Whoever pretends to see them must be either drunk or mad. As to this house—well, some of you had better walk in and re-assure yourselves. You are welcome."

He was taken at his word. A few came in, and went looking about for the ghost, upstairs and down. Telling of it now, it seems to have been the most ridiculous thing in the world. Nothing was to be found. The narrow passage above, where David had stood, was empty. "As if supernatural visitants waited while you looked after them!" cried the superstitious crowd outside.

It is easier to raise a disturbance of this kind than to allay it, and the ghost-seers stayed on. The heavy cloud in the heavens rolled away by and by; the moon came out, and shone on the casement again. But neither David Garth nor anything else was then to be seen there.

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The commotion of the night passed away; but not the rumours. That David Garth's spirit could not rest, but came back to trouble the

earth, especially that spot of it known as Willow Cottage, was accepted as a fact. People would go stealing up there at night, three or four of them arm-in-arm, and stand staring up at the casement, and walk round the cottage. Nothing more was to be seen—perhaps because there was no moon to light the window up. Harriet Roe was at home again with her husband; but she did not go much abroad: and her face seemed to have a sort of uneasy terror on it. “It’s the fear of seeing *him* that’s wearing her heart out; why does Roe stop in the place?” said North Crabb: and though Harriet had never been much of a favourite, she had plenty of sympathy now.

It soon came to be known in a gradual sort of way that a visitor was staying at Willow Cottage. A young woman fashionably dressed, who was called Mrs. James; and who was said to be the wife of James Roe, Louis Roe’s elder brother. Some people declared that a man was also there: they had seen one. Harriet denied it. An acquaintance of her husband’s, a Mr. Duffy, had been over to see them from Birmingham, she said, but he went back again. She was not believed.

What with the ghost, and what with the mystery attaching to its inhabitants, Willow Cottage was a great card just then. If you ask me to explain what mystery there could be, I cannot: all I know is, an idea that there was

something of the kind, apart from David, dawned upon many minds in North Crabb. Miss Timmens spoke of it openly. She did not like Harriet's looks, and said that something or other was killing her. And Susan Timmens considered it her duty to try and come to the bottom of it.

At all kinds of hours, seasonable and unseasonable, Miss Timmens presented herself at Willow Cottage. Rarely alone. Sometimes Mrs. Hill would be with her; or it would be Maria Lease; or one of the Batley girls; and once it was young Jim. Louis Roe grew to feel annoyed at this; he told Harriet he would not have confounded people coming there, prying; and he closed the door against them. So, the next time Miss Timmens went, she found the door bolted in the most inhospitable manner. Harriet threw open the parlour window to speak to her.

"Louis says he won't have any more visitors calling here just now; not even you, Aunt Susan."

"What does he say that for?" snapped Miss Timmens.

"We came down here to be quiet: he has some accounts to go over, and can't be disturbed at them. So perhaps you'll stay away, Aunt Susan. I'll come to the school house sometimes instead."

It was the dusk of evening, but Miss Timmens

could see the frightful look of illness on Harriet's face. She was also trembling.

"Harriet, what's the matter with you?" she asked in a kinder tone.

"Nothing."

"*Nothing!* Why, you are looking as ill as you can look. All your limbs are shaking."

"It's true I don't feel over well this evening, aunt, but I think it is nothing. I often feel as if I had got a touch of ague."

Miss Timmens bent her face nearer; it had a strange concern in it. "Harriet, look here. There's some mystery about this place; won't you tell me what it is? I—seem—to-be—afraid—for—you," she concluded, in a slow and scarcely audible whisper.

For answer, Miss Timmens found the window slammed down in her face. An impression arose—she hardly knew whence gathered, or whether it had any foundation—that it was not Harriet who had slammed it, but somebody concealed behind the curtain.

"Well I'm sure!" cried she. "It might have taken my nose off."

"It was so cold, aunt!" Harriet called out apologetically through the glass. "Good night."

Miss Timmens walked off in dudgeon. Revolving matters along the broad field-path, she liked less and less the appearance of things. Harriet was looking as ill as it was possible to look: and what meant that trembling? Was

it caused by sickness of body, or terror of mind? Mrs. Hill, when consulted, summed it up comprehensively : “ It is David about the place : that’s killing her.”

Harriet Roe did not make her appearance at the school-house, and the next day but one Miss Timmens went up again. The door was bolted. Miss Timmens knocked, but got no answer. Not choosing to be treated in that way, she made so much noise, first at the door and then at the window, that the former was at length unclosed by Mrs. James, in list shoes and a dressing-gown, as if her toilette had been delayed that day. The chain was kept up—a new chain that Miss Timmens had not seen before—and she could not get in.

“ I want to see Harriet, Mrs. James.”

“ Harriet’s gone,” replied Mrs. James.

“ Gone ! Gone where ?”

“ To London. She went off there yesterday morning.”

Miss Timmens felt, as she would have said, struck into herself. An idea flashed over her that the words had not a syllable of truth in them.

“ What did she go to London for ?”

Mrs. James glanced over her two shoulders, seemingly in terror herself, and sunk her voice to a whisper. “ She had grown afraid of the place, this dark winter weather. Miss Timmens—it’s as true as you’re there—nothing would per-

suade her out of the fancy that she was always seeing David Garth. He used to stand in a sheet at the end of the upstairs passage and look at her. Leastways, *she said so.*"

This nearly did for Miss Timmens. It might be true ; and she could not confute it. "Do you see him, Mrs. James ?"

" Well no ; I never have. Goodness knows, I don't want to."

" But Harriet was not well enough for a long journey," contended Miss Timmens. " She never could have undertaken one in her state."

" I don't know what you mean by 'state,' Miss Timmens. She would shake a bit at times ; but we saw nothing else the matter with her. Perhaps *you* would shake if you had an apparition in the house. Any way, well or ill, she went off to London. Louis took her as far as the station and saw her away."

" Will you give me her address ? I should like to write to her."

Mrs. James said she could not give the address, because she did not know it. Nothing more was to be got out of her, and Miss Timmens reluctantly departed.

" I should hope they've not murdered her—and are concealing her in the house as Hill concealed David," was the comment she gave vent to in her perplexity and wrath.

From that time, nothing could be heard of Harriet Roe. A week went on ; nearly two

weeks ; but she never was seen, and no tidings came of her. So far as could be ascertained, she had not gone away by train : neither station-master nor porter remembered to have seen her. Miss Timmens grew as thin as a ghost herself : the subject worried her night and day. That some ill had happened to Harriet ; or been *done* to her, she did not doubt. Once or twice she managed to see Roe ; once or twice she saw Mrs. James : speaking to them at the door with the chain between. Roe said he heard from his wife nearly every other day ; but he would not show the letters, or give the address : a conclusive proof to the mind of Miss Timmens that neither had existence. *What had they done with Harriet ?* Miss Timmens could not have been in much worse mental trouble had she herself made away with her.

One morning the postman delivered a letter at the school-house. It bore the London post-mark, and purported to be from Harriet. A few lines only—saying she was well and enjoying herself, and should come back sometime —the writing shaky and blotted, and bearing but a slight resemblance to hers. Miss Timmens dashed it on the table.

“ The fools, to think they can deceive me this way ! That's no more Harriet's writing than it is mine.”

But Miss Timmens's passion soon subsided

into a grave, settled, awful dread. For she saw that this had been written to delude her into the false belief that Harriet was in health and life—when she might be in neither one nor the other. She brought the letter to Crabb Cot. She took it round the parish. She went with it to the police-station; imparting her views of it to all freely. It was a sham; a blind; a forgery: and where was she to look for poor lost Harriet Roe?

That same evening the ghost appeared again. Miss Timmens and others went up to the cottage, intending to demand an interview with Roe; and they found the house shut up, apparently deserted. Reconnoitring the windows from all points, their dismayed eyes rested on something at the end casement: a thin, shadowy form, robed in white. Every one of them saw it; but, even as they looked, it seemed to vanish away. Yes, there was no question but the house was haunted. Perhaps Harriet had died from fright, as poor David died.

Things could not go on like this for ever. After another day or two of discomfort, Mr. Todhetley, as a county magistrate, incited to it by the public feeling in the parish, issued a private mandate for Roe to appear before him, that he might be questioned as to what had become of his wife. It was not a warrant; but a kind of friendly invitation, that could offend nobody. Jiff the policeman was entrusted with

the delivery of the message, a verbal one, and I went with him.

As if she had scented out our errand for herself, and wanted to make a third in it, who should meet us in the broad path, but Miss Timmens. Willow Cottage might or might not be haunted, but I am sure her legs were: they couldn't be still.

"What are *you* doing up here, Jiff?" she tartly asked.

Jiff told her. Squire Todhetley wanted Roe at Crabb Cot.

"It will be of no use, Jiff; the door's sure to be fast," groaned Miss Timmens. "My opinion is that Roe has left the place for good."

Miss Timmens was mistaken. The shutters were open, and the house showed signs of life. Upon knocking at the door—Miss Timmens took off her patten to do it, and you might have heard the echoes at North Crabb—it was flung wide by Mrs. James.

Mr. Roe? No, Mr. Roe was not at home. Mrs. Roe was.

Mrs. Roe was! "What, Harriet?" cried excited Miss Timmens.

Yes, Harriet. If we liked to walk in and see her, we could do so.

By the kitchen fire, as being the biggest and hottest, in a chair stuffed about with blankets, sat Harriet Roe. Worn, white, shadowy, she was evidently just getting over some desperate

illness. I stared; the policeman softly whistled; you might have blown Miss Timmens down with a feather.

"Good patience, child—why where have you been hiding all this while?" cried she. "And what on earth has been the matter with you?"

"I have been upstairs in my room, Aunt Susan, keeping my bed. As to the illness, it turned out to be ague and low fever."

"Upstairs where?"

"Here."

Jiff went out again; there was nothing to stay for. I followed, leaving Miss Timmens and Harriet to have it out together.

She had really been ill in bed all the while, Mrs. James and Roe attending on her. It did not suit them to admit visitors; for James Roe, who had fallen into some difficulty in London, connected with forged bills, was lying concealed at Willow Cottage. That's why people were kept out. It would not have done by any means for Miss Timmens and her sharp eyes to go up stairs and catch a glimpse of him; so they concocted the tale that Harriet was away. James Roe was safe away now, and Louis with him. Louis had been mixed up in the bill trouble in a less degree: but quite enough so to induce him to absent himself from London for a time, and to stay quietly at North Crabb.

"Was it fear, or ague that caused you to

shake so that last evening I saw you here?"  
questioned Miss Timmens.

"Ague. I never got out of bed after that night. I could hardly write that letter, aunt, that Louis sent to London to be posted to you."

"And—did you really see David Garth?"

"No, I never saw him," said Harriet. "But, after all the reports and talk, I was timid at being in the house alone—James and his wife had not come then—and that's why I asked you to let me stay at the school-house the night my husband was away?"

"But it was told to me that you *did* see him."

"I was always frightened for fear I should."

"It strikes me you have had other causes of fright as well, Harriet," cried shrewd Miss Timmens."

"Well, you see—this business of James Roe's has put me about. Every knock that came to the door seemed to me to be somebody coming for *him*. My husband says the ghost is all rubbish and fancy, Aunt Susan."

"Rubbish and fancy, does he?"

"He says that when he came in here with Johnny Ludlow, the night there was that commotion, in going up for some matches, he fell over something at the top of the stairs by the end casement, and flung it behind the rafters. Next day he saw what it was. I had tied a white cloth over a small dwarf mop to sweep the walls with, and must have left it near the

window. I remembered that I did leave it there. It no doubt looked in the moonlight just like a white face. And that's what was taken for David's ghost."

Miss Timmens paused, considering matters : she might believe just as much of this as she liked.

"It appeared again at the same place, Harriet, two or three days ago."

"That was me, aunt. I saw you all looking up, and drew away again for fear you should know me. Mrs. James was making my bed, and I had crawled there."

There it ended. So far the mystery was over. The explanation was confided to the public, who received it differently. Some accepted the mop version ; others clung unflinchingly to the ghost. And Hill never got a penny of his rent. Louis Roe was away ; and, as it turned out, did not come back again.

Mrs. James wanted to leave, also ; and Maria Lease took her place as nurse. Tenderly she did it, too ; and Harriet got well. She was going off to join her husband as soon as she could travel : it was said in France. Nobody knew : unless it was Maria Lease. She and Harriet had become confidential friends.

"Which is the worst fate—yours or mine?" cried Harriet to Maria, half mockingly, half woefully mournful, the day she was packing her trunk. "You have your lonely life, and

your never-ending repentance for what you call your harsh sin: I have my sickness and my trouble?—and I have enough of that, Maria.” But Maria Lease only shook her head in answer.

“ Trouble and repentance are our best lot in this world, Harriet. They come to fit us for heaven.”

But North Crabb, though willingly admitting that Harriet Roe, in marrying, had not entered on a bed of lilies, and might have been happier had she kept single, would not on the whole, be shaken out of its belief that the ghost still haunted the empty cottage. Small parties made shivering pilgrimages up there on a moonlight night, to watch for it, and sometimes declared that it appeared. Fancy goes a long way in this world.

## XXI.

## SEEING LIFE.

THE Clement-Pells lived at Parrifer Hall, and were as grand as all the rest of us put together. After that affair connected with Cathy Reed, and the death of his son, Major Parrifer and his family could not bear to stay in the place. They took a house near London, and Parrifer Hall was advertised to be let. Mr. Clement-Pell came forward to take it, and engaged it for a term of years.

The Clement-Pells rolled in riches. His was one of those cases of self-made men that have been so common of late years : where an individual, from a humble position, rises higher and higher by perceptible degrees, until he towers above all, like a Jack sprung out of a box, and is the wonder and envy of the world around. Mr. Clement-Pell was said to have begun life in London as a lawyer. Later, circumstances brought him down to a bustling town in our neighbourhood where he became the manager of a small banking company; and

from that time he did nothing but rise. "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune," says Shakespeare : and this was the tide in Mr. Clement-Pell's. The small banking company became a great one. Its spare cash helped to make railways, to work mines, and to do all kinds of profitable things. The shareholders flourished ; Mr. Clement-Pell was more regarded than any heathen deity. He established a branch at two or three small places ; and, amidst them, at Church Dykely. After that, he took Parrifer Hall. The simple people around could not vie with the grandeur of the Pells, and did not try to. The Pells made much of me and Joseph Todhetley—perhaps because there was a dearth of young fellows near—and often asked us to the Hall. Mrs. Pell, a showy, handsome woman, turned up her nose at all but the best families, and would not associate with farmers, however much they might live like gentlepeople. She was decisive in manner, haughty, and ruled the house and everything in it, including her husband, with iron will. In a slight degree she and her children put us in mind of the Parrifers : for they held their heads in the clouds as the Parrifers had done, and the ostentation they displayed was just the least bit vulgar. Mr. Pell was a good-looking, gentlemanly man, with a pleasant, hearty, straightforward manner that took with everybody. He was neither fine nor

stuck up : but his wife and daughters were ; after the custom of a good many who have shot up into greatness.

And now that's the introduction of the Clement-Pells. One year they took a furnished house in London, and sent to invite me and Tod up in the summer. It was not very long after we had paid that visit to the Whitneys and Miss Deveen. The invitation was cordially pressed ; but Squire Todhetley did not much like our going.

"Look here, you boys," said he, as we were starting, for the point was yielded, "I'd a great deal rather you were going to stay at home. Don't you let the young Pells lead you into mischief."

Tod resented the doubt. "We are not boys, sir."

"Well, I suppose you'd like to call yourselves young men," returned the Pater ; "you in particular, Joe. But young men have gone up to London before now, and come home with their fingers burnt."

Tod laughed.

"They have. It is this, Joe : Johnny, listen to me. A young fellow, freshly launched on the world, turns out very much according to the companions he is thrown with and the associations he meets. I have a notion that the young Pells are wild ; fast, as it is called now ; so take care of yourselves. And don't

forget that though their purses may be unlimited, yours are not."

Three footmen came rushing out when the cab stopped at the house in Kensington, and the Pells made much of us. Mr. Pell and the eldest son, James, were at the chief bank in the country ; they rarely spared the time to come up ; but the rest were in town. Mrs. Pell, the four girls, the two sons, and a new German governess. The house was not as commodious as Parrifer Hall, and Tod and I had a top room between us, two beds in it. Fabian Pell had a commission in the army. Augustus was reading for the bar—he was never called at home anything but "Gusty."

We got there just before dinner, and dressed for it—finding dress was expected. A worn-looking, fashionable man of thirty was in the drawing-room when we went down, the Honourable Mr. Crayton : and Fabian brought in two officers. Mrs. Pell wore blue, with a string of pearls on her neck that were too big to be real : the two girls were in white silk and white shoes. Altogether, considering it was not a state occasion but a friendly home dinner, the dresses looked too fine, more fit for a duke's table ; and I wondered what Mrs. Todhetley would have said to them.

" Will you take Constance in to dinner, Mr. Todhetley ? "

Tod took her. She was the second girl : the

eldest, Martha Jane, went in with one of the officers. The younger girls, Leonora and Rose, dined in the middle of the day with the governess. Gusty was not there, and Fabian and I went in together.

"Where is he?" I asked of Fabian.

"Gusty? Oh, knocking about somewhere. His getting home to dinner's always a chance. He has chambers in town."

Why the idea should have come over me, I know not, unless it was the tone Mrs. Pell spoke in, but it flashed across my mind that she was looking towards Tod as a possible husband for her daughter Constance. He was not of an age to marry yet: but some women like to plot and plan for these things beforehand. I hated her for it: I did not care that Tod should choose one of the Pells. Gusty made his appearance in the course of the evening; and we fellows went out with him.

The Squire was right: it was fast life at the Pells', and no mistake. I don't believe there was a thing that took money but Fabian and Gusty Pell and Crayton went in for it. Crayton was with them always. He seemed to be the leader: the Pells followed him like sheep; Tod went with them. I sometimes: but they did not always ask me to go. Billiards and cards were the chief amusements; and there'd be theatres and singing-rooms. The names of some of the places would have made the

Squire's hair stand on end. One, a kind of private affair, that the Pells and Crayton said it was a favour to get admittance to, was called "Paradise." Whether that was only the Pells' or Crayton's name for it, we did not hear. And a paradise it was when you got inside, if decorations and mirrors can make a paradise. Men and women in evening dress sang sweet songs in a kind of orchestra; to which you might listen sitting and smoking, or lounging about and talking: if you preferred a rubber at whist or hand at écarté in another room, there you had them. Never a thing was there, apparently, that the Squire could have reasonably grumbled at, save the risk of losing money at cards, and the sense of intoxicating pleasure. But I don't think it was a good place to go to. The Pells called all this "Seeing Life."

It would not have done Tod much harm—for he had his head on his shoulders the right way—but for the gambling. It is a strong word to use; but the play grew into nothing less. Had the Squire said to us, Take care you don't learn to gamble up in London, Tod would have resented it as much as if he had been warned not to go and hang himself, feeling secure that there was no more chance of one than the other. But gambling, like some other things, drinking for instance, steals upon you by slow degrees, too imperceptibly

for you to take alarm. The Pells and Crayton and other fellows that they knew went in for cards and billiards wholesale. Tod was asked at first to take a quiet hand with them ; or just play for the tables—and he thought no more harm of complying than if the girls had pressed him to make one at the round game of Old Maid, or to while away a wet afternoon at bagatelle.

There was no regularity in Mrs. Pell's household : there was no more outward observance of religion than if we'd lived in Heathendom. It was so different from Tod's last London visit, when he was at the Whitneys'. *There* you had to be at the breakfast-table to the moment—half-past eight ; and to be in at bedtime, unless engaged out with friends. Sir John read a chapter of the Bible morning and night, and then, pushing the spectacles lower on his old red nose, he'd look over them at us and tell us simply to be good boys and girls. *Here* you might come down at any hour, from nine or ten, to eleven or twelve, and ring for fresh breakfast to be supplied to each. As to staying out at night, that was quite ad libitum ; a man servant sat up till morning to open the door.

I was initiated less into the card-playing than Tod, and never once was asked to make one at Pool, probably because it was taken for granted that I had less money to stake. Which

was true. Tod had not much, for the matter of that : and it never struck me to think he was losing wholesale.

I got home one night at twelve, having been dining at Miss Deveen's, and to a concert with her afterwards. Tod was not in, and I sat up in our room, writing to Mr. Brandon, which I had put off doing until I felt ashamed. Tod came in as I was folding the letter. It was hot weather, and he stretched himself out at the open window.

"Are you going to stop there all night, Tod?" I asked by-and-by. "'It's one o'clock."

"I may as well stop here, for all the sleep I shall get in bed," was his answer, as he brought his head in. "I'm in an awful mess, Johnny."

"What kind of mess?"

"Debt."

"Debt! What for?"

"Card-playing," answered Tod shortly.  
"And betting at Pool."

"Why do you play?"

"I'll be shot if I would ever have touched one of their cards, or their billiard balls either, had I thought what was to come of it. Let me once get out of this hole, and neither Gusty Pell nor Crayton shall draw me in again. I'll promise them *that*."

"How much is it?"

"That I owe? Twenty-five pounds."

"Twenty-five—what?" I cried, starting up.

"Don't wake up the next room, Johnny. Twenty-five pounds. And not a stiver in my pocket to go on with. I owe it to Crayton."

Sitting on the edge of his bed, he told me how the thing had crept upon him. At first they only played for shillings: one night Crayton suddenly changed the stakes to sovereigns. The other fellows, playing, took it as a matter of course, and Tod did not like to make a fuss, and get up——

"I should, Tod," I interrupted.

"I daresay you would," he retorted. "I didn't. But I honestly told them that if I lost much, my purse would not pay it. Oh that need not trouble you, they said. When we rose, that night, I owed Crayton nineteen pounds."

"They must be systematic gamblers!"

"No, not that. Gentlemen who play high. Since then I have played, hoping to redeem my losses—they tell me I shall be sure to do it. But the redemption has not come yet, for it is twenty-five pounds now."

"Tod," I said, after a pause, "it would about kill the Pater."

"It would awfully vex him. And that's what is doing the mischief, you see, Johnny. I can't write home for the money without telling him what I want it for; he'd never give

it me unless I said : and I can't cut our visit short to the Pells and leave Crayton in debt."

" But—*what's* to be done, Tod ? "

" Nothing, until I get some luck, and win enough back to pay him."

" You may get deeper into the mire."

" Yes—there's that chance."

" It will never do to go on playing."

" Will you tell me what else I am to do ? I must continue to play : or pay."

I couldn't tell him ; I didn't know. Fifty of the worst problems in Euclid were nothing to this. Tod sat down in his shirt-sleeves.

" Get one of the Pells to let you have the money, Tod. A loan of twenty or thirty pounds can be nothing to them."

" It's no good, Johnny. Gusty is cleaned out. As to Fabian, he never has any spare cash, what with one expensive habit or another. Oh I shall win it back again : perhaps to-morrow. The luck must turn."

Tod said no more. But what particularly struck me was this : that, to win money from a guest in that way, and he a young fellow not of age, whose pocket-money they knew was limited, was not at all consistent for " gentlemen."

The next evening we were in a well-known billiard-room. Fabian Pell, Crayton, and Tod were at Pool. It had been a levee day, or something of that, and Fabian was in full

regimentals. Tod was losing, as usual. He was no match for those practised players.

"I wish you'd get me a glass of water, Johnny," he said.

So I got it. In turning back after taking the glass from his hand, whom should I see on the high bench against the wall, sitting just where I had been sitting a minute before, but my guardian and trustee, Mr. Brandon. Could it be? Old Brandon in London!—and in a billiard-room!

"It is never you, sir! Here!"

"Yes, it is I, Johnny Ludlow," he said in his squeaky voice. "As to being here, I suppose I have as much right to be here as you: perhaps rather more. I should like to ask what brings *you* here."

"I came in with those three," I said, pointing towards the board.

He screwed up his little eyes, and looked. "Who are they?" he asked. "Who's the fellow in scarlet?" For he did not happen to know these two younger Pells by sight.

"That's Fabian Pell, sir. The one standing with his hands in his pockets, by Joseph Todhetley, is the Honourable Mr. Crayton."

"Who's the Honourable Mr. Crayton?"

"I think his father is the Earl of Lackland."

"Oh, ah; one of Lackland's sons, is he. There's six or eight sons of them, Johnny Ludlow, and not a silver coin amidst the lot."

Lackland never had much, but what little it was he lost at horse-racing. The sons live by their wits, I've heard : lords' sons have not much work in them. The Honourable Mr. Crayton, eh ! Your two friends had better take care of themselves."

The thought of how Tod had "taken care" of himself flashed into my mind. I'd not have old Brandon know it for the world.

"I posted a letter to you to-day, sir. I did not know you were from home."

"What was it about ? "

"Nothing particular, sir. Only I had not written since we were in London."

"How long are you going to stay here, Johnny Ludlow ? "

"About another week, I suppose."

"I mean *here*. In this disreputable room."

"Disreputable, sir ! "

"Yes, Johnny Ludlow, disreputable. Disreputable for all young men, especially for a very young one like you. I wonder what your father would have said to it ! "

"I, at least, sir, am doing no harm in it."

"Yes, you are, Johnny. You are suffering your eye and mind to grow familiar with these things. So, their game is over, is it ! "

I turned round. They had finished, and were leaving. In looking for me, Tod saw Mr. Brandon. He came up to shake hands with him, and told me they were going.

"Come in and see me to-morrow morning, Johnny Ludlow," said Mr. Brandon, in a tone of command. "Eleven o'clock."

"Yes, sir. Where are you staying?"

"The Tavistock; Covent Garden."

"Johnny, what the mischief brings *him* here?" whispered Tod, as we went downstairs.

"I don't know. I thought it must be his ghost at first."

From the billiard-rooms we went on to Gusty's chambers, and found him at home with some friends. He served out wine, with cold brandy and water for Crayton—who despised anything less. They sat down to cards—loo. Tod did not play. Complaining of a racking headache, he sat apart in a corner. I stood in another, for all the chairs were occupied. Altogether the party seemed to lack life, and broke up soon.

"Was it an excuse to avoid playing, Tod?" I asked, as we walked home.

"Was what an excuse?"

"Your headache."

"If your head were beating as mine is, Johnny, you'd not call it an excuse. You'll be a muff to the end of your days."

"Well, I thought it might be that."

"Did you! If I made my mind up not to play, I should tell it out straightforwardly: not put forth any shuffling 'excuse.'"

"Any way, the headache's better than losing your money."

"Don't bother."

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I got to the Tavistock at five minutes past eleven, and found Mr. Brandon reading the Times. He looked at me over the top of it, as if he were surprised.

"So you *have* come, Mr. Johnny!"

"Yes, sir. I turned up the wrong street and missed my way: it has made me a little late."

"Oh that's the reason, is it," said Mr. Brandon. "I thought perhaps a young man, who has been initiated into the ways of London life, might no longer consider it necessary to attend to the requests of his elders."

"But would you think that of me, sir?"

Mr. Brandon put the newspaper on the table with a dash, and burst out with as much feeling as his weak voice would let him.

"Johnny Ludlow, I'd rather have seen you come to sweep a crossing in this vile town, than to frequent one of its public billiard-rooms!"

"But I don't frequent them, Mr. Brandon."

"How many times have you been in?"

"Twice in the one where you saw me: once in another. Three times in all."

"That's three times too much. Have you played?"

"No, sir; there's never any room for me to play."

"Do you bet?"

"Oh no."

"What do you go for, then?"

"I've only gone in with the others when I have been out with them."

"Pell's sons and the Honourable Mr. Crayton. Rather ostentatious of you, Johnny Ludlow, to hasten to tell me he was the 'Honourable.'"

My face flushed. I had not said it in that light.

"One day at Pershore Fair, in a show-booth, the clown jumped on to the boards and introduced himself," continued Mr. Brandon: "'I'm the clown, ladies and gentlemen,' said he. That's the Honourable Mr. Crayton, say you. ——And so you have gone in with Mr. Crayton and the Pells!"

"And with Joseph Todhetley."

"Ay. And perhaps London will do him more harm than it will you; you're not much better than a boy yet, hardly up to bad things. I wonder what possessed Joe's father to let you two come up to stay with the Pells! I should have been above it, in his place."

"Above it! Why, Mr. Brandon, they live in ten times the style we do."

"And spend twenty times as much over it. Who was thinking about style or cost, Mr. Johnny? Don't you mistake Richard for Robert."

He gave a flick to the newspaper, and stared me full in the face. I did not venture to speak.

"Johnny Ludlow, I don't like your having been initiated into the iniquity of fast life—as met with in billiard-rooms, and such places."

"I have got no harm from them, sir."

"Perhaps not. But you might have got it."

I supposed I might : and thought of Tod and his losings.

"You have good principles, Johnny Ludlow, and you've a bit of sense in your head ; and you have been taught to know that this world is not the end of things. Temptation is bad for the best, though. When I saw you in that place last night, looking on with eager eyes at the balls, listening to the betting with eager ears, I wished I had never let your father make me your guardian."

"I did not know my eyes or ears were so eager, sir. I don't think they were."

"Nonsense, boy : that goes as a matter of course. You have heard of gambling hells ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, a public billiard-room is not many degrees better. It is crowded by adventurers who live by their wits. Your needy 'honourables,' who've not a sixpence of their own in

their purses, and your low-lived blackguards, who have sprung from the scum of a population, are equally at home there. These men, the lord's son and the blackguard, must each make a living : whether by turf-betting, or dice, or cards, or pool—they must do it somehow. Is it a nice thing, pray, for you honest young fellows to frequent places where you must be their boon companions ? ”

“ No, I don't think it is.”

“ Good, Johnny. Don't you go into one again—and keep young Todhetley out if you can. It is no place, I say, for an honest man and a gentleman : you can't brush by a pitch-pot, and not get a daub on you somewhere ; neither can a youngster frequent these billiard-rooms and the company he meets in them, and come away unscathed. His name will get a mark against it. That's not the worst : his soul may get a mark upon it ; and never be able to throw it off again during life. You turn mountebank, and dance at wakes, Johnny, rather than public billiard player. There's many an honest mountebank, dancing for the daily crust he puts into his mouth : I don't believe you'd find one honest man amongst billiard sharpers.”

He dropped the paper in his heat. I picked it up.

“ And that's only one phase of their fast life, billiard-rooms,” he continued. “ There are

other things : singing halls, and cider cellars—and all kinds of places. You steer clear of the lot, Johnny. And warn Todhetley. He wants warning perhaps more than you want it."

"Tod has caught no harm, I think, except—"

"Except what ?" asked he sharply, as I paused.

"Except that I suppose it costs him money, sir."

"Just so. A good thing too. If these seductions (as young fools call them) could be had without money, the world would soon be turned upside down. But as to harm, Johnny, once a young fellow gets to feel at home in these places, I don't care how short his experience may be, he loses his self-respect. He does ; and it takes time to get it back again. You and Joe had not been gone five minutes last night, with your 'Honourable' and the other one in scarlet, when there was a row in the room. Two men quarrelled over a bet ; sides were taken by the spectators, and it came to blows. I have heard some reprobate language in my day, Johnny Ludlow, but I never heard such as I heard then. Had you been there, I'd have taken you by the back of the neck and pitched you out of window, before your ears should have been tainted with it."

"Did you go to the billiard-room, expecting to see me there, Mr. Brandon ?" I asked. And the question put his temper up.

"Go to the billiard-room, expecting to see *you* there, Johnny Ludlow!" he retorted, his voice a small shrill pipe. "How dare you ask it? I'd as soon have expected to see the Bishop of London there, as you. I can tell you what, young man: had I known you were going to these places, I should pretty soon have stopped it. Yes, sir: you are not out of my hands yet. If I could not stop you personally, I'd stop every penny of your pocket-money."

"We couldn't think—I and Tod—what else you had gone for, sir," said I, in apology for having put the question.

"I don't suppose you could. I have a graceless relative, Johnny Ludlow; a sister's son. He is going to the bad fast, and she got me to come up and see what he was after. I could not find him; I have not found him yet; but I was told that he frequented those rooms, and I went there on the speculation. Now you know. He came up to London nine months ago as pure-hearted a young fellow as you are: bad companions laid hold of him, and are doing their best to ruin him. I should not like to see *you* on the downward road, Johnny; and you sha'n't go on it if I can put a spoke in the wheel. Your father was my good friend."

"There is no fear of me, Mr. Brandon."

"Well, Johnny, I hope not. You be cautious, and come and dine with me this evening. And now will you promise me one thing: if you get

into any trouble or difficulty at any time, whether it's a money trouble, or what not, you come to me with it. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir. I don't know any one I would rather take it to."

"I do not expect you to get into one willingly, mind. *That's* not what I mean : but sometimes we fall into pits through other people. If ever you do, though it were years to come, bring the trouble to me."

And I promised. And went, according to the invitation, to dine with him in the evening. He had found his nephew : a plain young medical student, with a thin voice like himself. Mr. Brandon dined off boiled scrag of mutton ; I and the nephew had fish and fowl and plum pudding.

After that evening I did not see anything more of old Brandon. Upon calling at the Tavistock, they said he had left for the rest of the week, but would be back on the following Monday.

And it was on the following Monday that Tod's affairs came to a climax.

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We had had a regal entertainment. Fit for regal personages—as it seemed to us simple country people, inexperienced in London dinner giving. Mrs. Pell headed her table in green

gauze, gold beetles in her hair, and a feathered-fan that dangled. Mr. Pell, who had come to town for the party, faced her; the two girls, the two sons, and the guests were dispersed on either side. Eighteen of us in all. Crayton was there as large as life, and of the other people I did not know all their names. The dinner was given for some great gun who had to do with railway companies. He kept it waiting twenty minutes, and then loomed in with a glistening bald head, and yellow rose in his coat: his wife, a very little woman in pink, on his arm.

"I saw your father yesterday," called out Pell down the table to Tod. "He said he was glad to hear you were enjoying yourselves."

"Ah—yes—thank you," replied Tod, in a hesitating kind of way. I don't know what *he* was thinking of; but it flashed into my mind that the Squire would have been anything but "glad," had he known about the cards and the billiards, and the twenty-five pound debt.

The dinner came to an end at last, and we found a few evening guests in the drawing-room—mostly young ladies. Some of the dinner people went away. The railway man sat whispering with Pell in a corner: his wife nodded asleep, and woke up to talk by fits and starts. The youngest girl, Rose, who was in the drawing-room with Leonora and the governess, ran up to me.

"Please let me be your partner, Mr. Ludlow! They are going to dance a quadrille in the back drawing-room."

So I took her, and we had the quadrille. Then another, that I danced with Constance. Tod was not to be seen anywhere.

"I wonder what has become of Todhetley?"

"He has gone out with Gusty and Mr. Crayton, I think," answered Constance. "It is too bad of them."

By one o'clock all the people had left; the girls and Mrs. Pell said good night and disappeared. In going up to bed, I met one of the servants.

"Do you know what time Mr. Todhetley went out, Richard?"

"Mr. Todhetley, sir? He has not gone out. He is in the smoking-room with Mr. Augustus and Mr. Crayton. I've just been up to take some soda-water."

I went on to the smoking-room: a small den of a place, built out on the leads of the second floor, that nobody presumed to enter but Gusty and Fabian. The cards lay on the table in a heap, and the three round it were talking hotly. I could see there had been a quarrel. Some stranger had come in, and was standing with his back to the mantel-piece. They called him Temply; a friend of Crayton's. Temply was speaking as I opened the door.

"It is clearly a case of obligation to go on;

of honour. No good in trying to shirk it, Todhetley."

"I will not go on," said Tod, as he tossed back his hair from his hot brow with a desperate hand. "If you increase the stakes without my consent, I have a right to refuse to continue playing. As to honour, I know what that is as well as any one here."

They saw me then : and none of them looked too well pleased. Gusty asked me what I wanted ; but he spoke quite civilly.

"I came to see after you all. Richard said you were here."

What they had been playing at, I don't know : whether whist, écarté, loo, or what. Tod, as usual, had been losing frightfully : I could see that. Gusty was smoking ; Crayton, cool as a cucumber, drank hard at brandy and soda. If that man had swallowed a barrel of cognac, he would never have shown it. Tempty and Crayton stared at me rudely. Perhaps they thought I minded it.

"I'd not play again to-night, if I were you," I said aloud to Tod.

"No, I won't; there," he cried, giving the cards an angry push. "I am sick of the things—and tired to death. Good night to you all."

Crayton swiftly put his back against the door, barring Tod's egress. "You cannot leave before the game's finished, Todhetley."

"We had not begun the game," rejoined Tod. "You stopped it by trebling the stakes. I tell you, Mr. Crayton, I'll not play again to-night."

"Then perhaps you'll pay me your losses."

"How much are they?" asked Tod, biting his lips.

"To-night?—or in all, do you mean?"

"Oh, let us have it all," was Tod's answer; and I saw that he had great difficulty in suppressing his passion. All of them, save Crayton, seemed tolerably heated. "You know that I have not the ready money to pay you; you've known that all along: but it's as well to ascertain how we stand."

Crayton had been coolly turning over the leaves of a note-case, adding up some figures there, below his breath.

"Eighty-five before, and seven to-night makes just ninety-two. Ninety-two pounds, Todhetley."

I sprang up from the chair in terror. It was as if some dreadful blast had swept over me.

"Ninety-two pounds! Tod! do you owe *that*?"

"I suppose I do."

"*Ninety-two pounds!* It cannot be. Why, it is close upon a hundred!" Crayton laughed at my consternation, and Templay stared.

"If you'll go on playing, you may redeem some of it, Todhetley," said Crayton. "Come, sit down."

"I will not touch another card to-night," said he, doggedly. "I have said it: and I am not one to break my word: as Johnny Ludlow here can testify. I don't know that I shall play again after to-night."

Crayton was offended. Cool though he was, I think he was somewhat the worse for what he had taken—perhaps they all were. "Then you'll make arrangements for paying your debts," said he, in a scornful tone.

"Yes, I'll do that," answered Tod. And he got away. So did I, after a minute or two: Gusty kept me, talking.

In passing upstairs, for we slept on the third floor, Mr. Pell came suddenly out of a room on the left; a candle in one hand, and some papers in the other, and a look on his face as of some great trouble.

"What! are you young men not in bed yet!" he exclaimed. "It is late."

"We are going up now. Is anything the matter, sir?" I could not help asking.

"The matter?" he repeated.

"I thought you looked worried."

"I am worried with work," he said, laughing slightly. "While others take their needful rest, I have to be up at my books and letters. Great wealth brings great care with it, Johnny Ludlow, and hard work as well. Good night, my lad."

Tod was pacing the room with his hands in

his pockets. It was a dreadful position for him to be in. Owing a hundred pounds—to put it in round numbers—for a debt of honour. No means of his own, not daring to tell his father. I mounted on the iron rail of my little bed opposite the window, and looked at him.

“Tod, what *is* to be done?”

“For two pins I’d go and enlist in some African regiment,” growled he. “Once over the seas, I should be lost to the world here, and my shame with me.”

“Shame!”

“Well, and it is shame. An ordinary debt that you can’t pay is bad enough, but a debt of honour ——”

He stopped, and caught up his breath with a kind of sob—as if there were no word strong enough to express the sense of shame.

“It will never do to tell the Pater.”

“Tell *him*!” he exclaimed sharply. “Johnny, I’d cut off my right hand—I’d fling myself into the Thames, rather than bring such a blow on him.”

“Well, and so I think would I.”

“It would kill him as sure as that we are here, Johnny. He would look upon it that I have become a confirmed gambler, and I believe the shock and grief would be such that he’d die of it. No: I have not been so particularly dutiful a son, that I should bring *that* upon him.”

I balanced myself on the bed-rail. Tod paced the carpet slowly.

"No, never," he repeated, as if there had not been a pause. "I would rather die myself."

"But what is to be done?"

"Heaven knows. I wish the Pells had been far enough, before they had invited us up."

"I wish you had never consented to play with the lot at all, Tod. You might have stood out from the first."

"Ay. But one glides into these things unconsciously. Johnny, I begin to think Crayton is just a gambler, playing to win, and nothing better."

"Playing for his bread. That is, for the things that constitute it. His drink, and his smoke, and his lodgings, and his boots and rings. Old Brandon said it. As to his dinners, he generally gets them at friends' houses."

"Old Brandon said it, did he?"

"Why, I told you so the same day. And you bade me shut up."

"Do you know what they want me to do, Johnny? To sign a post-obit bond for two hundred, or so, to be paid after my father's death. It's true. Crayton will let me off then."

"And will you do it?" I cried, feeling that my eyes blazed as I leaped down.

"No, I *won't*: and I told them so to-night.

That's what the quarrel was about. 'Every young fellow does it whose father lives too long and keeps him out of his property,' said that Tempty. 'May be so; I won't,' I answered. Neither will I. I'd rather break stones on the road than speculate upon the good Pater's death, or anticipate his money in that manner to hide my sins.'

"Gusty Pell ought to help you."

"Gusty says he can't. Fabian, I believe, really can't; he is in difficulties of his own: and sometimes, Johnny, I fancy Gus is. Crayton fleeces them both, unless I am mistaken. Yes, he's a sharper; I see through him now. I want him to take my I O U to pay him as soon as I can, and he knows I would do it, but he won't do that. There's two o'clock."

It was of no use sitting up, and I began to undress. The question reiterated itself again and again—what was to be done? I lay awake all night thinking, vainly wishing I was of age. Fanciful thoughts crossed my mind: of appealing to rich old Pell, and asking him to lend the money, not betraying Gusty and the rest by saying what it was wanted for; of carrying the story to Miss Deveen, and asking her; and lastly of going to old Brandon, and getting *him* to help. I grew to think that I *would* do this, however much I disliked it, and try Brandon; that it lay in my duty.

Worn and haggard enough looked Tod the

next morning. He had sat up nearly all night. When breakfast was over, I started for the Tavistock, whispering a word to Tod first.

"Avoid the lot to-day, Tod. I'll try and help you out of the mess."

He burst out laughing in the midst of his perplexity. "*You, Johnny!* what next?"

"Remember the fable of the lion and the mouse."

"But you can never be the mouse in this, you mite of a boy! Thank you all the same, Johnny: you mean it well."

"Can I see Mr. Brandon?" I asked at the hotel, of a strange waiter.

"Mr. Brandon, sir? He is not staying here."

"Not staying here!"

"No, sir, he left some days ago."

"But I thought he was coming back again."

"So I believe he is, sir. But he has not come yet."

"Do you know where he is?"

"At Brighton, sir."

It was about as complete a floorer as I'd ever wish to get. All the way along, I had been planning which way to break it to him. I turned to the door, whistling and thinking. Should I go after him to Brighton? I had the money, I had the time, why should I not? Heaven alone knew how much depended upon Tod's release from the trouble; heaven alone knew what

desperate course he might take in his mortifying shame, if not released from it.

Dropping a note to Tod, saying I should be out for the day, and getting a porter to take it up, I made the best of my way to the nearest Brighton station, and found a train starting. Brighton was a large place, and they could not tell me at the Tavistock what hotel Mr. Brandon was at ; save that one of the waiters “thought” it might be the Old Ship. And that’s where I first went, on arrival.

No. No one of the name of Brandon was at the Old Ship. So there I was, like an owl in a wilderness, wondering where to go next.

And how many hotels and inns I tried before I found him, it would be impossible to remember now. One of the last was up Kemp Town way—the Royal Crescent Hotel.

“ Is Mr. Brandon staying here ? ”

“ Mr. Brandon of Warwickshire ? Yes, sir.”

It was so very unexpected an answer after all the denials, that I hardly believed my own ears. Mr. Brandon was not well, the waiter added ; suffering from cold and sore throat—but he supposed I could see him. I answered that I must see him ; that I had come all the way from London on purpose.

Old Brandon was sitting in a long room, whose bow-window looked out on the sea ; some broth at his elbow, and a yellow silk handkerchief resting cornerwise on his head.

"Mr. Ludlow, sir," said the waiter. And he dropped the spoon into the broth, and stared at me as if I were an escaped lunatic.

"Why!—you! What on earth brings *you* here, Johnny Ludlow?"

To tell him what, was the hardest task I'd ever had in my life. And I did it badly. Sipping half spoonfuls of his broth and looking hard at me while he listened did not help the process. I don't know how I got it out, or how confused was the way I told it in—that I wanted him to let me have a hundred pounds of my own money.

"A hundred pounds, eh?" said he. "You are a nice gentleman, Johnny Ludlow!"

"I am very sorry, sir, to have to ask it. The need of it is very urgent, or I should not."

"What's it for?" questioned he, nibbling a bit of the parsley that was in the broth.

"I—it is to pay a debt, sir," I answered, feeling my face flush hot.

"Whose debt?"

By the way he looked at me, I could see that he knew as plainly as though I had told him, that it was not my debt. And yet—but for letting him think it was mine, he might turn a totally deaf ear. Old Brandon finished up his broth, and put the basin down.

"You are a clever fellow, Johnny Ludlow, but not quite clever enough to deceive me. You'd no more get into such unseemly debt

yourself, than I should. I have a better opinion of you than that. Who has sent you here?"

"Indeed, sir, I came of my own free will. No one knows, even, that I have come. Mr. Brandon, I hope you will help me : it is nearly a matter of life or death."

"You are wasting words and time, Johnny Ludlow."

And I felt I was. Felt it hopelessly.

"There's an old saying, and a very good one, Johnny—Tell the whole truth to your lawyer and doctor. I am neither a lawyer nor a doctor : but I promise you this much, that unless you tell me the truth of the matter, every word of it, and explain the meaning of your request fully and clearly, you may go marching back to London."

There was no help for it. I spoke a few words, and they were enough. He seemed to grasp the question as by magic, and turned me, as may be said, inside out. In five minutes he knew by heart as much of it as I did.

"So!" said he, in his squeaky voice—ten times more squeaky always when he was vexed. "Good! A nice nest you have got amongst. Want him to give post-obit bonds, do they ! Which *is* Todhetley—a knave or a fool ?"

"He has refused to give the bonds, I said, sir."

"Bonds, who's talking of bonds?" he retorted. "For playing, *I* mean. He must have been

either a knave or a fool, to play till he owed a hundred pounds when he knew he had not the means to pay."

"But I have explained how it was, sir. He lost, and then played on, hoping to redeem his losses. I think Crayton had fast hold of him, and would not let him escape."

"Ay. Got hold of him, and held him. That's your grand friend, the Honourable, Johnny Ludlow. There: give me the newspaper."

"But you will let me have the money, sir."

"Not if I know it."

It was a woeful check. I set on and begged him as if I had been begging for my life: saying I hardly knew what. That it might save Tod from a downhill course—and spare grief to the poor old Squire—and pain to me. Pain that would lie on my mind always, knowing that I possessed the money, yet might not use it to save him.

"It's of no use, Johnny. I have been a faithful guardian to you, and done well by your property. Could your dead father look back on this world and see the income you'll come into when you are of age, he would know I speak the truth. You cannot suppose I should waste any portion of it, I don't care how slight.a one, in paying young men's wicked gambling debts."

I prayed him still. I asked him to put himself in my place and see if he would not feel as

I felt. I said that I should never—as I truly believed—have an opportunity of spending money that would give me half the pleasure of this, or do half the good. Besides, it was but a loan : Tod was sure to repay it when he could. No : old Brandon was harder than flint. He got up and rang the bell.

“ We'll drop it, Johnny. What will you take? Have you had anything since breakfast?”

“ No, sir. But I don't want anything.”

“ Bring up dinner for this young gentleman,” he said, when the waiter appeared. “ Anything you have that's *good*. And be quick about it, please.”

They brought up a hasty dinner : and very good it was. But I coulds scarcely eat for sorrow. Old Brandon, nursing himself at the opposite end of the table, the yellow handkerchief on his head, looked at me all the while.

“ Johnny Ludlow, do you know what I think—that you'd give away your head if it were loose. It's a good thing you have me to take care of you.”

“ No, sir, I should not. If you would let me have this hundred pounds—it is really only ninety-two, though—I would repay it with two hundred when I came of age.”

“ Like the simpleton you are.”

“ I think I would give half my money, Mr. Brandon, to serve Todhetley in this dreadful strait. We are as brothers.”

"No doubt you would : but you've not got it to give, Johnny. You can let him fight his own battles."

"And I would if he were able to fight them : but he is not ; it's a peculiar case. I must go back to London, and try there."

Old Brandon opened his eyes. "How?"

"I think perhaps Miss Deveen would let me have the money. She is rich and generous—and I will tell her the full truth. It is a turning point in Todhetley's life, sir : help would save him."

"How do you know but he'd return to the mire ? Let him have this money, and he might go on gambling and lose another hundred. Perhaps hundreds at the back of it."

"No, sir, that he never would. He may go deeper into the mire if he does not get it. Enlist, or something."

"Are you going already, Johnny ?"

"Yes, sir. I must catch the next train, and it's a good way to the station."

"You can take a fly. Wait a few minutes."

He went into his bedroom, on the same floor. When he came back, he had a piece of paper in his hand.

"There, Johnny. But it is my loan ; not yours."

It was a cheque for one hundred pounds. He had listened, after all ! The surprise was so great that I am afraid my eyes were dim.

"The loan is mine, Johnny," he repeated :

"I am not going to risk your money, and prove myself a false trustee. When Todhetley can repay it, it will be to me, not to you. But now —understand. Unless he will give you a solemn promise never to play with that 'Honourable' again, or with either of the Pells, *you will not use the cheque, but give it back to me.*"

"Oh, Mr. Brandon, there will be no difficulty. He only wants to be quit of them."

"Get his promise, I say. If he gives it, present this cheque at Robarts's bank in Lombard Street to-morrow, and they'll pay you the money over the counter."

"It is made out to my order!" I said, looking at the cheque. "Not to Crayton!"

"To Crayton!" retorted Mr. Brandon. "I'd not let a cheque of mine, uncrossed, get into *his* hands. He might add an ought or two on to the figures. I drew it out for an even hundred, you see: the odd money may be wanted. You'll have to sign your name at the back: do it at the bank. And now, do you know why I have let you have this?"

I looked at him in doubt.

"Because you have obeyed the injunction I gave you—to bring any difficulty to me. I certainly never expected it so soon, or that it would take this form. Don't you get tumbling into another. Let people take care of themselves. There: put it into your breast pocket, and be off."

I don't know how I got back to town. There was no accident, and we were not pitched into next week. If we had been, I'm not sure that I should have minded it; for that cheque in my pocket seemed a panacea for all human ills. The Pells were at dinner when I entered: and Tod was lying outside his bed with one of his torturing headaches. He did not often get them: which was a good thing, for they were rattlers. Taking his hand from the top of his head, he glanced at me.

"Where have you been all day, Johnny?" he asked, hardly able to speak. "That was a short note of yours."

"I've been to Brighton."

Tod opened his eyes again with surprise. He did not believe it.

"Why don't you say to Bagdad at once? Keep your counsel if you choose, lad. I'm too ill to get it out of you."

"But I don't want to keep it: and I have been to Brighton. Had dinner there, too. Tod, old fellow, the mouse has done his work. Here's a cheque for you for a hundred pounds."

He looked at it as I held it out to him, saw it was true, and then sprang off the bed. I had seen glad emotion in my life, even at that early period of it, but hardly such as Tod's then. His face was working. Never a word spoke he.

"It is lent by Mr. Brandon to you, Tod. He bade me say it. I could not get any of mine

out of him. The only one condition is—that, before I cash it, you shall promise not to play again with Crayton or the Pells."

"I'll promise it now. Glad to do it. Long live old Brandon! Johnny, my good brother, I'm too ill to thank you—my temples seem as if they were being split with a sledge-hammer—but you have *saved* me."

I was at Robarts's when it opened in the morning. And signed my name at the back of the cheque, and got the money. Fancy *me* having a hundred pounds paid to me in notes and gold! The Squire would have thought the world was coming to an end.

## XXII.

## OUR STRIKE.

IT was in September, and they were moving to Crabb Cot for a week or two's shooting. The shooting was not bad about there, and the Squire liked a turn with his gun yet. Being close on the Michaelmas holidays, Tod and I were with them.

When the stay was going to be short, the carriages did not come over from 'Dyke Manor. On arriving at South Crabb station, there was a fly waiting. It would not take us all. Mr. and Mrs. Todhetley, the two children, and Hannah got into it, and some of the luggage was put on the top.

"You two boys can walk," said the Pater.  
"It will stretch your legs."

And a great deal rather walk, too, than be boxed up in a crawling fly !

We took the way through Crabb Lane : the longest but merriest, for it was always alive with noise and dirt. Reports had come abroad long before that Crabb Lane was "out on strike :" Tod and I thought we would take a look at it in this new aspect.

There were some great works in the vicinity—I need not state here their exact speciality—and men employed at them chiefly inhabited Crabb Lane. It was the setting-up of these works that caused the crowded dwellings in Crabb Lane to be built—for where a mass of workmen come congregating together, dwellings must of necessity follow.

You have heard of Crabb Lane before—in connection with what I once told you about Harry Lease the pointsman. It was a dingy, over-populated, bustling place, prosperous on the whole, and its inhabitants as a rule were well-to-do. A strike was quite anew feature, bringing to most of them a fresh experience in life. England had strikes in those past days, but they were not common.

Crabb Lane during working hours had hitherto been given over to the children, who danced in the gutters and cried and screamed themselves hoarse. Women also would be out of doors, idling away their time in gossip, or else calling across to each other from the windows. But now, as I and Tod went down it, things looked different. Instead of women and children, men were there. Every individual man, I believe, out of every house the lane contained; for there appeared to be shoals of them. They lounged idly against the walls, or stood about in groups. Some with pipes, some without; some laughing and jeering, ap-

parently in the highest of spirits, as if they were at the top of fortune's tree ; some silent and anxious-looking.

" Well, Hoar, how are you ? "

It was Tod who spoke. The man he addressed, Jacob Hoar, was one of the best of the workmen : a sober, steady, honest fellow, with a big frame and resolute face. He had the character of being fierce in temper, sometimes savage with his fellow men, if put out. Alfred Hoar—made pointsman at the station in poor Harry Lease's place—was his brother.

Hoar did not answer Tod at all. He was standing quite alone near the door of his house, a strangely defiant look upon his pale face, and his firm lips drawn in. Unless I was mistaken, some of the men over the way were taking covert glances at him, as though he were a kangaroo they had to keep aloof from. Hoar turned his eyes slowly upon us, took off his round felt hat, and smoothed back his dark hair.

" I be as well as matters 'll let me be, young Mr. Todhetley," he then said.

" There's a strike going on, I hear," said Tod. " Has been for some time."

" Yes, there's a strike a-going on," assented Hoar, speaking all the while in a deliberate, sullen manner, as a man resenting some special grievance. " Has been for some time, as

you say. And I don't know when the strike 'll be a-going off."

"How is Eliza?" I asked.

"Much as usual, Mr. Johnny. What should ail her?"

Evidently there was no sociability to be got out of Jacob Hoar that afternoon, and we left him. A few yards further, we passed Ford's—the baker's. No end of heads were propelling themselves out of the shop door, and *they* seemed to be staring at Hoar.

"He must have been dealing out a little abuse to the public generally, Tod," said I.

"Very likely," answered Tod. "He seems to be bursting with some rage or another."

"Nay, I don't think it's so much rage as vexation. Something must have gone wrong."

"Well, perhaps so."

"Look here, Tod. If we had a home to keep up and a lot of mouths to feed and weekly rent to pay, and a strike stopped the supplies, we might be in a worse humour than Hoar is."

"Right, Johnny." And Tod went off at a strapping pace.

How it may be with other people, I don't know: but when I get back to a place after an absence, I want to see everybody, and am apt to go dashing in at doors without warning.

"It won't take us a minute to look in on

Miss Timmens, Tod," I said, as we came near the schoolhouse. "She'll tell us the news of the whole parish."

"Take the minute, then, if you like," said Tod. "I am not going to bother myself with Miss Timmens."

Neither perhaps should I, after that, for Tod swayed me still; but in passing the door it was pulled wide open by one of the little scholars. Miss Timmens sat in her chair, the lithe, thin cane (three yards long) raised in her hand, its other end descending, gently enough, on the shoulder of a chattering girl.

"I don't keep it to beat 'em," Miss Timmens was wont to say of her cane, "but just to tap 'em into attention when they are beyond the reach of my hand." And, to give her her due, it was nothing more.

"It's you, is it, Master Johnny? I heard you were all expected."

"It's me, safe enough. How goes the world with you, Miss Timmens?"

"Cranky," was the short answer. "South Crabb's going out of its senses, I think. The parson is trying to introduce fresh ways and doings in my school: new-fangled rubbish, Master Johnny, that will bring more harm than good: I won't have it, and so he and I are at daggers drawn. And there's a strike got hold of the place!"

I nodded. While she spoke, it had struck

me, looking at the room, that it was not so full as usual.

"It's the strike does that," she said, in a kind of triumph. "It's the strike that works all the ill and every kind of evil"—and it was quite evident the strike found no more favour with her than the parson's attempted fresh ways.

"But what has the strike to do with the children's non-coming to school?"

"The strike has carried all the children's best things to the pawnshop, and they've nothing left to come abroad in that's decent. That is one cause, Johnny Ludlow," she concluded, very tartly.

"Is there any other?"

"Don't you think that sufficient? I am not going to let them appear before me in rags—and so Crabb Lane knows. But there is another cause, sir. This strike has so altered the course of things that the whole order of ord'nary events is turned upside down. Even if the young ones' frocks were at home again, it would be ten to one against their coming to school."

"I don't see the two little Hoars." And why I had been looking for those particular children I can't say, unless it was that Hoar and his peculiar manner had been floating in my mind ever since we passed him.

"Liza and Jessy—no, but they've been here till to-day," was the reply, given after a long

pause. "Are you going, Mr. Johnny?—I'll just step outside with you."

She drew the door close behind her, keeping the handle in her hand, and threw her eyes straight into my face.

"Jacob Hoar has gone and beat his boy almost to death this morning—and the strike's the cause of *that*," she whispered, emphatically.

"Jacob Hoar has!—Why, how came he to do it?"—I exclaimed, recalling more forcibly than ever the curious look of the man, and the curious looks of the other men holding back from him. "Which of his boys is it?"

"The second of them; little Dick. Yes, he is black and blue all over, they say; next door to beat to death; and his arm broken. And they have the strike to thank for it."

She repeated the concluding words more stinging than before. That Miss Timmens was wroth with the strike, there could be no mistake. I asked her why the strike was to be thanked for the beating and the broken arm.

"Because the strike has brought misery; and *that* is the source of all the ill going on just now in Crabb Lane," was her reply. "When the men threw themselves out of work, of course they threw themselves out of wages. Some funds have been furnished to them, weekly I believe, from the Trades Union League—or whatever they call the thing—but it seems a mere nothing compared to what they

used to earn. Household goods, as well as clothes, have been going to the pawn-shop ; but they have now pledged all they've got to pledge, and are, it is said, in sore straits : mothers and fathers and children alike hungry. It is some time now since they have had enough to eat. Fancy that, Mr. Johnny ! ”

“ But why should Dicky be beaten for that ? ” I persisted, trying to keep her to the point—a rather difficult matter with Miss Timmens at all times.

“ It was in this way,” she answered, dropping her voice to a lower key, and giving a pull at the door to make sure it had not opened. “ Dicky, poor fellow, is half starved ; he’s not used to it, and feels it keenly : resents it, I dare say. This morning, when out in the lane, he saw a tray of halfpenny buns, hot from the oven, put on old Ford’s counter. The sight was too much for him, the temptation too great. Dicky Hoar is naturally honest ; he has been, up to now, at all events : but I suppose hunger was stronger than honesty to-day. He crept into the shop on all fours, abstracted a bun with his fingers, and was creeping out again, when Ford pounced upon him, bun in hand. There was a fine outcry. Ford was harsh, roared out for the policeman, and threatened him with jail ; and in the midst of the commotion Hoar came up. In his mortification at hearing that a boy of his had been caught

pilfering, he seized upon a thick stick that a by-stander happened to have, and laid it unmercifully upon poor Dick."

"And broke his arm?"

"And broke his arm. And covered him with weals beside. He'll be all manner of colours to-morrow."

"What a brutal fellow Hoar must be!"

"To beat him like that?—well, yes," assented Miss Timmens, in an accent that bore rather a dubious sound; "passion must have blinded him and urged him further than he intended. The man has always been upright; prided himself on being so, as one may say; and there's no doubt that to find his child could be a thief shook him cruelly. This strike is ruining the tempers of the men; it makes them feel at war with everything and everybody."

When I got home I found them in the thick of the news also, for Cole the doctor was there telling it. Mrs. Todhetley, sitting on the sofa with her bonnet untied and her shawl unpinned, was listening in a kind of amazed horror.

"But surely the arm cannot be *broken*, Mr. Cole!" she urged.

"*Broken* just above the wrist, ma'am. I ought to know, for I set it. Wicked little rascal, to steal the bun! As to Hoar, he is as fierce as a tiger when really enraged."

"Well, it sounds very shocking."

"So it does," said Cole. "I think perhaps it may be productive of one good—keep the boy from picking and stealing to the end of his life."

"He was hungry, you say."

"Famished, ma'am. Most of the young ones in Crabb Lane are so just now."

The Squire was walking up and down the room, his hands in his pockets. He halted, and turned to face the doctor.

"Look here, Cole—what has brought this state of things about? A strike!—and prolonged! Why, I should as soon have expected to hear the men had thrown up their work to become Merry Andrews! Who is in fault? —the masters or the men?"

Cole lifted his eyebrows. "The masters lay the blame on the men, the men lay it on the masters."

"What is it the men are holding out for?"

"To get more wages, and to do less work."

"Oh, come, that's a twofold demand," cried the Pater. "Modest folks generally ask for one favour at a time. Meanwhile things are all at sixes and sevens, I suppose, in Crabb Lane."

"Ay," said the doctor. "At worse than sixes and sevens, indoors and out. There are empty cupboards and empty rooms within; and there's a good deal of what's bad without. It's the wives and children that suffer, poor things."

"The men must be senseless to throw themselves out of work!"

"The men only obey orders," cried Mr. Cole. "There's a spirit of disaffection abroad: certain people have constituted themselves into rulers, and they say to the men, 'You must do this,' and 'You must not do that.' The men have yielded themselves up to be led, and *do* do what they are told, right or wrong."

"I don't say they are wrong to try to get more wages if they can; it would be odd if we were to be debarred from bettering ourselves," spoke the Squire. "But to throw up their work while they are trying, there's the folly; there's where the shoe must tighten. Let them keep on their work while they agitate."

"They'd tell you, I expect, that the masters would be less likely to listen then than they are now."

"Well, they've no right, in common-sense, to throw up their wives' and children's living, if they do their own," concluded the Squire.

Cole nodded. "There's some truth in that," he said as he got up to leave. "Any way, things are more gloomy with us than you'd believe, Squire."

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"You may remember that I told you, when speaking of the Court and my early home, how,

when I was a little child of four years old, Hannah my nurse, and Eliza one of her fellow servants, commented freely in my hearing on my father's second marriage, and shook me well because I was wise enough to understand them. Eliza was then housemaid at the Court ; and soon after this she had left it to marry Jacob Hoar. She was a nice kind of young woman (in spite of the shaking), and I kept up a great acquaintance with her, and was free, so to say, of her house in Crabb Lane, running in and out of it at will, when we were at Crabb Cot. A tribe of little Hoars arrived, one after another. Jacky, the eldest, over ten now, had a place at the works, and earned two shillings a week. "'Twarn't much,'" said Hoar the father, "but 'twas bringing his hand in." Dick, the second, he who had just got the beating, was nine ; two girls came next, and there was a young boy of three.

Hoar earned capital wages—to judge by the comfortable way in which they lived : I should think not less than forty shillings a week. Of course they spent it all, every fraction ; as a rule, families of that class never put by for a rainy day. They might have done it, I suppose : in those days provisions were nothing like as dear as they are now ; the cost of living altogether was less.

Of course the Hoars had to suffer in common with the rest under the strike. But I did not

like to hear of empty cupboards in connection with Eliza ; no, nor of her boy's broken arm ; and in the evening I went back to Crabb Lane to see her. They lived next door but one to the house that had been Lease's—the pointsman ; but theirs was far better than that tumble-down hut.

Well, it was a change ! The pretty parlour looked half dismantled. Its ornaments and better things had gone, as Miss Timmens expressed it, to ornament the pawn-shop. The carpet also. Against the wall, on a small mattress brought down for him, lay Dicky and his bruises. Some of the children sat on the floor : Mrs. Hoar was kneeling over Dicky and bathing his cheek, which was big enough for two, for it had caught the stick kindly.

“ Well, Eliza ! ”

She got up, sank into a chair, flinging her apron over her face, and burst into tears. I suppose it was at the sight of me. Not knowing what to say to that, I pulled the little girls' ears and then sat down on the floor by Dicky. *He* began to cry.

“ Oh come, Dick, don't ; you'll soon be better. Face smarts, does it ? ”

“ I never thought to meet you like this, Master Johnny,” said Eliza, getting up and speaking through her sobs. “ 'Twas hunger made him do it, sir ; nothing

else. The poor little things be so famished at times it a'most takes the sense out of 'em."

"Yes, I am sure it was nothing else. Look up, Dick. Don't cry like that." One would have thought the boy was going into hysterics.

I had an apple in my pocket and gave it to him. He kept it in his hand for some time and then began to eat it ravenously, sobbing now and then. The left arm, the one that was broken, lay across him, bound up in splints.

"I didn't mean to steal the bun," he whispered, looking up at me through his tears. "I'd ha' give Mrs. Ford the first ha'penny for it that I'd ever got. I was a-hungered, I was. We be always a-hungered now."

"It is hard times with you, I am afraid, Eliza," I said, standing by her.

Opening her mouth to answer, a sob caught her breath and her side—for she suddenly put her hand upon the latter. Her poor face, naturally patient and meek, was worn, and had a spot of bright hectic. Eliza used to be very pretty and was young-looking still, with smooth brown hair, and mild grey eyes: she looked very haggard now and less tidy. But, as to being tidy, how can folks be that, when all their gowns worth a crown are hanging up at the pawnbroker's?

"It's dreadful times, Master Johnny. It's times that frighten me. Worse than all, I can't see when it is to end, and what the end is to be."

"Don't lose heart. The end will be that the men will go to work again; I dare say soon."

"The Lord send it!" she answered. "That's the best we can hope for, sir; and that'll be hard enough. For we shall have to begin life again, as 'twere; with debts all around us, and our household things and our clothes in pledge."

"You will get them out again then?"

"Ay; but how long will it take to earn the money to do it? This strike, as I look upon it, has took at the rate of five years of prosperity out of our lives, Master Johnny."

"The league—or whatever it is—allows you all money to live, does it not?"

"We get some, sir. It's not a great deal. They tell us that there's strikes a-going on in many parts just now; these strikes have to be helped as well as the operatives here; and so it makes the allowance small. We have no means of knowing whether that's true or not, us women I mean; but I dare say it is."

"And the allowance is not enough to keep you in food?"

"Master Johnny, there's so many other

things one wants, beside bare food," she answered, with a sigh. "We must pay our rent, or the landlord would turn us out: we must have a bit o' coal for firing: we must have soap; clothes must be washed, sir, and we must be washed: we must have a candle these dark evenings: shoes must be mended: and there's other trifles, too, that I needn't go into, as well as what Hoar takes for himself——"

"But does he take much?" I interrupted, the item striking me.

"No, sir, he don't: nothing to what some of 'em takes: he has always been a good husband and father. The men, you see, sir, must have a few halfpence in their pockets to pay for their smoke, and that, at their meetings in the evening. There's not much left for food when all this comes to be taken out—and we are seven mouths to fill."

No wonder they were hungry!

"Some of the people you've known ought to help you, Eliza. Mrs. Sterling at the old home might: or Mrs. Coney. Do they?"

Eliza Hoar shook her head. "The gentlemen be all again us, sir, and so the ladies dare not do anything. As to Mrs. Sterling—I don't know that she has so much as heard of the strike—all them miles off."

"You mean the gentlemen are against the strike?"

" Yes, sir : dead again it. They say strikes is the worst kind of evil that can set in, both for us and for the country : that it will increase the poor-rates to a height to be afraid of, and in the end drive the work away from the land. Sitting here with my poor children around me at dusk to save candle, I get thinking sometimes that the gentlemen may not be far wrong, Master Johnny."

Seeing the poor quiet faces lifted to me, from which every bit of spirit seemed to be gone, I wished I had my pockets full of buns for them. But buns were not likely to be there ; and of money I had none : the buying of one of the best editions of Shakespeare had just cleared me out.

" Where's Hoar ? " I asked, in leaving.

A hot flush came over her face. " He has not shown himself here, Master Johnny, since what he did to *him*," was her resentful answer, pointing to Dick. " Afraid to face me, he is."

" I'd not say too much to him, Eliza. It could not undo what's done, and might only make matters worse. I daresay Hoar is just as much vexed about it as you are."

" It's to be hoped he is ! Why did he go and set upon the child in that cruel way ? It's the men that goes in for the strike ; 'tisn't us : and when the worry of it makes 'em so low they hardly know where to turn, they must vent it upon us. Master Johnny, there are

minutes now when I could wish myself dead but for the children."

I went home with my head full of a scheme —the getting Mrs. Todhetley and perhaps the Coneys to do something for poor Eliza Hoar. But I soon found I might as well have pleaded the cause of the public hangman.

Who should come into our house that evening but old Coney himself. As if the strike were burning a hole in his tongue, he began upon it before he was well seated, and gave the Squire his version of it: that is, his opinion. It did not differ in substance from what had been hinted at by Eliza Hoar. Mr. Coney did not speak *for* the men or *against* them; he did not speak for or against the masters: that question of conflicting interests he said he was content to leave: but what he did urge, and very strongly, was, that strikes in themselves must be productive of an incalculable amount of harm; they brought misery on the workmen, pecuniary embarrassment on the masters, and they most inevitably would, if persisted in, eventually ruin the trade of the kingdom; therefore they should, by every possible means, be discouraged. The Squire, in his hot fashion, took up these opinions for his own and enlarged upon them.

When old Coney was gone and we had our slippers on, I told them of my visit to Eliza, and asked them to help her just a little.

"Not by a crust of bread, Johnny," said the Squire, more firmly and quietly than he usually spoke. "Once begin to assist the wives and children, and the men would have so much the less urgent need of bringing the present state of things to an end."

"I am so sorry for Eliza, sir."

"So am I, Johnny. But the proper person to be sorry for her is her husband: her weal and woe can lie only with him."

"If we could help her ever so little!"

The Squire looked at me for a full minute. "Attend to me, Johnny Ludlow. Once for all, NO! The strike, as Coney says, must be discouraged by every means in our power. *Discouraged*, Johnny. Otherwise these strikes may come into fashion, and grow to an extent of which no man can foresee the end. They will bring the workmen to one of two things—starvation, or the workhouse. That result seems to me to be inevitable."

"I'm sure it makes me feel very uncomfortable," said the Mater. "One can hardly see where one's duty lies."

"Our poor-rates are getting higher every day: what do you suppose they'll come to if this is to go on?" continued the Squire. "I'd be glad for the men to get better pay if they are underpaid now: whether they are or not, I cannot tell: but rely upon it, striking work is not the way to attain to it. It's a way that

has ruined many a hopeful workman, who otherwise would have gone on contentedly to the end of his days ; ay, and has finally killed him. It will ruin many another. Various interests are at stake in this ; you must perceive it for yourself, Johnny lad, if you have any brains ; but none so great as that of the workmen themselves. With all my heart I wish, for their own sakes, they had not taken this extreme step."

" And if the poor children starve, sir ? " I ventured to say.

" Fiddlestick to starving ! They need not starve while there's a workhouse to go to. And *won't* ; that's more. *Can't* you see how all this acts, Mr. Johnny ? The men throw themselves out of work ; and when matters come to extremity the parish must feed the children, and we, the ratepayers, must pay. A pleasant prospect ! How many scores of children are there in Crabb Lane alone ? "

" A few dozens, I should say, sir."

" And a few to that. No, Johnny ; let the men look to their families' needs. For their own sakes ; I repeat it ; for their own best interests, I'll have them let alone. They have entered on this state of things of their own free will, and they must themselves fight it out. —And now get you off to bed, boys."

" The Pater's right, Johnny," cried Tod, stepping into my room as we went up, his

candle flaring like ten in the draught from the open staircase window ; “ right as right can be on principle ; but it *is* hard for the women and children——”

“ It is hard for themselves, too, Tod : only they have got the unbending spirit of Britons, to hold out to the death and make no bones over it.”

“ I wish you’d not interrupt a fellow,” growled Tod. “ Look here : I’ve got four-and-sixpence, every farthing I can count just now. You take it, and give it to Eliza. The Pater need know nothing.”

He emptied his trousers pocket of the silver, and went off with his candle. I’m not sure but that he and I both enjoyed the state of affairs as something new. Had anybody told us a year ago that our quiet neighbourhood could be disturbed by a public ferment, such as this, we should never have believed it.

The next morning I went over to South Crabb with the four-and-sixpence. Perhaps it was not quite fair to give it, after what the Squire had said—but there’s many a worse thing than that done daily in the world. Eliza caught up her breath when I gave it to her, and thanked me with her eyes as well as her lips. She had on a frightfully old green gown—green once—shabby and darned and patched, and no cap : and she was on her knees wiping up some spilt water on the floor.

"Mind, Eliza, you must not say a word to any one. I should get into no end of a row."

"You were always generous, Master Johnny. Even when a baby——"

"Never mind that. It is not I that am generous now. The silver was given me for you by somebody else : I am cleared out, myself. Where's Dicky ?"

"He's upstairs in his bed, sir ; too stiff to move. Mr. Cole, too, said he might as well lie there to-day. Would you like to go up and see him ?"

As I ran up the staircase, open from the room, a vision of her wan face followed me—of the catching sob again—of the smooth brown hair which she was pressing from her temples. We have heard of a peck of troubles : she seemed to have a bushel.

Dicky was a sight ; as far as variety of colours went, he might have gone and shown himself off as a walking church window. There was no mistake about his state of stiffness.

"It won't last long, Dick ; and then you'll be as well as ever."

Dick's grey eyes—they were just like his mother's—looked up at mine. I thought he was going to cry.

"There. You will never take anything again, will you ?"

Dick shook his head as emphatically as his

starched condition allowed. "Father says as he'd kill me the next time if I did."

"When did he say that?"

"This morning; afore he went out."

Dicky's room had a lean-to roof, and was about the size of our jam closet at Crabb Cot. Not an earthly article was in it but the mattress he was lying on.

"Who sleeps here besides you, Dicky?"

"Jacky and little Sam. Liza and Jessy sleeps by father and mother."

"Well, good day, Dicky."

Whom should I come upon at the end of Crabb Lane, but the Squire and Hoar. The Squire had his gun in his hand and was talking his face red: Hoar leaned against the wooden palings that skirted old Massock's garden, and looked as sullen as he had looked yesterday. I thought the Pater had been blowing him up for beating the boy; but it seemed that he was blowing him up for the strike. Cole, the surgeon, hurrying along on his rounds, stopped just as I did.

"Not your fault, Hoar!" cried the Squire. "Of course I know it's not your fault alone, but you are as bad as the rest. Come: tell me what good the strike has done for you."

"Not much as yet," readily acknowledged Hoar, in a tone of incipient defiance.

"To me it seems nothing less than a crime to throw yourself out of work. There's the

work ready to your hands, *spoiling* for want of being done—and yet you won't do it!"

"I do but obey orders," said Hoar: who seemed to be miserable enough, in spite of the incipient defiance.

"But is there any sense in it?" reasoned the Squire. "If you men could drop the work and still keep up your homes and their bread-and-cheese and their other comforts, I'd say nothing. But look at your poor suffering wives and children. I should be *ashamed* to be idle, when my idleness bore such consequences."

The man answered nothing. Cole put in his word.

"There are times when I feel *I* should like to run away from my work and go in for a few weeks' or months' spell of idleness, Jacob Hoar; and drink my two or three glasses of port wine after dinner of a day, like a lord; and be altogether independent of my station, and my patients, and of every other obligation under the sun. But I can't. I know what it would do for *me*—bring me to the parish."

"D'ye think we throw up the work for the sake o' being idle?" returned Hoar. "D'ye suppose, sirs,"—with a burst of a sigh—"that this state o' things is a *pleasure* to us? We are doing it for future benefit. We are told by them who act for us, and who must know, that great benefit will come of it if we

be only firm ; that our rights be in our own hands if we only persevere long enough in standing out for 'em. Us men has our rights, I suppose, as well as other folks."

"Those who, as you term it, act for you may be mistaken, Hoar," said the Squire. "I'll leave that : and go on to a different question. Do you think that the future benefit (whatever that may be : it's vague enough now) *is worth the cost you are paying for it?*"

No reply. A look crossed Hoar's face that made me think he sometimes asked the same question of himself.

"It does appear to be a very *senseless* quarrel, Hoar," went on the Squire. Cole had walked on. "One-sided, too. There's an old saying, 'Cutting off one's nose to spite one's face,' and your strike seems just an illustration of it. You see, it is only *you men* that suffer. The rulers you speak of don't suffer : while they are laying down rules for you, they are flourishing on the meat and corn of the land ; the masters, in one sense, do not suffer, for they are not reduced to any extremity of any kind. But you, my poor fellows, *you* bear the brunt of it all. Look at your homes, how they are bared ; look at your hungry children. What but hunger drove little Dick to crib that bun yesterday ?"

Hoar took off his hat and passed his hand over his brow and his black hair. It

seemed to be a favourite action of his when in any worry of thought.

"It is just ruin, Jacob Hoar. If some great shock—say a mountain of snow or a thunder-bolt—descended suddenly from the skies and destroyed everything there was in your home, leaving but the bare walls standing, what a dreadful calamity you would think it. How bitterly you'd bemoan it!—perhaps almost feel inclined, if you only dared, to reproach Heaven for its cruelty! But you—you bring on this calamity yourself, of your own free and deliberate will. You have dismantled your home with your own fingers; you have taken out your goods and sold or pledged them, to buy food. I hear you have parted with all."

"A'most," assented Hoar readily; as if it quite pleased him the Squire should show up the case at its worst.

"Put it that you resume work to-morrow, you don't resume it as a free man. You'll have a load of debt and embarrassment on your shoulders. You will have your household goods to redeem—if they are then still redeemable: you will have your clothes and shoes to buy, to replace present rags: while on your mind will lie the weight of all this past time of trouble, cropping up every half-hour like a nightmare. Now—is the future benefit you hint at worth all this?"

Hoar twitched a thorny spray off the hedge  
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behind the pales, and twirled it about between his teeth.

"Any way," he said, the look of perplexity clearing somewhat on his face, "I be but doing as my mates do; and we are a-doing for the best. So far as we are told and believe, it'll be all for the best."

"Then *do* it," returned the Squire in a passion: and went stamping away with his gun.

"Johnny, they are all pig-headed together," he presently said, as we crossed the stile into the field of stubble whence the corn had been reaped. "One can't help being sorry for them: they are blinded by specious arguments that will turn out, I fear, to be all moonshine. Hold my gun, lad. Where's that dog, now? Here, Dash, Dash, Dash!"

Dash came running up; and Tod with him.

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In a fortnight's time, Crabb Cot was deserted again. Tod and I returned to our studies, the Squire and the rest to Dyke Manor. As the weeks went on, scraps of news would reach us about the strike. There were meetings of the masters alone: meetings of the men and what they called delegates; meetings of masters and men combined. It all came to nothing. The masters at length offered to concede a little: the men (inwardly wearied out, sick to death of the untoward whole) would have

accepted the slight concession and returned to work with willing feet ; but their rulers—the delegates, or whatever they were—said no. And so the idleness and the pinching distress continued : the men got more morose, and the children more ragged. After that (things remaining in a chronic state, I suppose) we heard nothing.

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“ Another lot of faggots, Thomas ; and heap up the coal. This is weather ! Goodness, man ! Don’t put the coal on gingerly, as if you were afraid of it. Molly’s a fool.”

We were in the cozy sitting-room again at Crabb Cot. The Squire was right : it *was* weather : the coldest I have ever felt in December. Old Thomas’s hands were frozen with the outside drive from the station. Molly, who had come on the day before, had got about a penny-worth of fire in the grate to greet us with. Naturally it put the Squire’s temper up.

“ That there strike’s a-going on still, sir,” began Thomas, as he waited to watch his faggots blaze up.

“ No ! ” cried the Squire. For we had supposed it, naturally, to be at an end.

“ It is, though, master. Ford the driver telled me, coming along, that Crabb Lane was in a fine state for distress.”

“ Oh, dear ! I wish I knew whose fault it

is!" bewailed Mrs. Todhetley. "What more did the driver say, Thomas?"

"Well, ma'am, *he* said it must be the men's fault—because there the work is, still a-waiting for 'em, and they won't do it."

"The condition the poor children must be in!"

"Like hungry wolves," said old Thomas. "'Twas what Ford called 'em, and he ought to know: own brother to Ford the baker, as lives in the very thick of the spot!"

Nothing, hardly, was talked of that evening but the strike. Its stretch of continuance half frightened some of us. Old Coney, coming in to smoke his pipe with the Squire, pulled a face as long as your arm over the poor-rate prospect: the Squire wondered how much work would stay in the country.

It was said the weekly allowance made to the men was not so much as it had been at first. It was also said that the Society, making it, considered Crabb Lane in general had been particularly improvident in laying the allowance out, or it would not have been reduced to its present distressed condition. Which was not to be wondered at, in Mr. Coney's opinion: people used to very good wages, he said, could not all at once pull up habits and look at every farthing as a miser does. Crabb Lane was reproachfully assured by the Society that other strikes had kept themselves quite respectable,

comparatively speaking, upon just the same allowance, and not parted with *all* their pots and pans.

That night I dreamt of the strike. It's as true as that I am writing this. I dreamt I saw thousands and thousands of red-faced men—not pale ones—each tossing a loaf of bread up and down.

"I suppose I may go over and see Eliza," I said to Mrs. Todhetley, after breakfast in the morning.

"There is no reason why you may not, Johnny, that I know of," she answered, after a pause. "Except the cold."

As if I minded the cold! "I hope the whole lot, she and the young ones, won't look like skeletons, that's all. Tod, will you come?"

"Not if I know it, old fellow. I have no fancy for seeing skeletons."

"Oh, that was all my nonsense."

"I know that. A pleasant journey to you."

The hoar frost had gathered on the trees, the ice hung in fantastic shapes from their branches: it was altogether a beautiful sight. Groups of Miss Timmens's girls, coming to school with frozen noses, were making slides as they ran. As to Crabb Lane, it looked nearly deserted: the cold kept the men in-doors. Knocking at Hoar's door with a noise like a fire-engine, I went in with a leap.

The scene I came upon brought me up short.

Just at first I did not understand it. In the self-same corner by the fire-place where Dicky's bed had been that first day, was a bed now, and Eliza lay on it: and by her side, wedged against the wall, what looked to be a bundle of green baize with a calico nightcap on. The children—and really and truly they were not much better than live skeletons—sat on the floor.

"What's to do here, you little mites? Is mother ill?"

Dicky, tending the fire (I could have put it in a cocoa-nut), turned round to answer me. He had got quite well again, arm and all.

"Mother's *very* ill," said he in a whisper.  
"That's the new baby."

"The new what?"

"The new baby," repeated Dick, pointing to the green bundle. "It's two days old."

An old tin slop-pail, turned upside down, stood in the hearth corner. I sat down on it to revolve the news and take in the staggering aspect of things.

"What do you say, Dick? A baby—two days old?"

"Two days," returned Dick. "I'd show him to you but for fraid o' waking mother."

"He caine here the night afore last, he did, while we was all asleep upstairs," interposed the younger of the little girls, Jessy. "Mr. Cole brought him in his pocket: father said so."

"'Twasn't the night afore last,'" corrected 'Liza. "'Twas the night afore that."

Poor, pale, pinched faces, with never a smile on either one! Nothing takes the spirit out of children like semi-famine, long continued.

Stepping across, I looked down at Mrs. Hoar. Her eyes were half open as if she were in a state of stupor. I don't think she knew me: I'm not sure she even saw me. The face was fearfully thin and hollow, and white as death.

"Wouldn't mother be better upstairs, Dick?"

"She's here 'cause o' the fire," returned Dick, gently dropping on a bit of coal the size of a marble. "There ain't no bed up there, neither; they've brought it down."

The "bed" looked like a wide sack of shavings. From my heart I don't believe it was anything else. At that moment, the door opened and a woman came in; a neighbour, I suppose; her clothes very thin.

"It's Mrs. Watts," said Dick.

Mrs. Watts curtsied. She looked as starved as they did. It seemed she knew me.

"She be very bad, Mr. Ludlow, sir."

"She seems so. Is it—fever?"

"Law, sir! It's more famine nor fever. If her strength can last out—why, well and good; she may rally. If it don't, she'll go, sir."

"Ought she not to have things, Mrs. Watts? Beef-tea and wine, and that."

Mrs. Watts stared a minute, and then her lips parted with a sickly smile. "I don't know where she'd get 'em from, sir! Beef-tea and wine! A drop o' plain tea is a'most more nor us poor can manage to find now; the strike have lasted long, you see, sir. Anyway she's too weak to take much of anything."

"If I—if I could bring some beef-tea—or some wine—would it do her good?"

"It might just be the saving of her life, Mr. Ludlow, sir."

I went galloping home through the snow and the slides. Mrs. Todhetley was stoning raisins in the dining-room for the Christmas puddings. Telling her the news in a heap, I sat down to get my breath.

"Ah, I was afraid so," she said quietly, and without surprise. "I feared there might be another baby at the Hoars' by this time."

"Another baby at the Hoars'!" cried Tod, looking up from my new Shakespeare that he was skimming. "How is it going to get fed?"

"I fear that's a problem none of us can solve, Joseph," said she.

"Well, folks must be daft, to go on collecting a heap more mouths together, when there's nothing to feed them on," concluded Tod, dropping his head into the book again. Mrs. Tod-

hetley was slowly wiping her hands on the damp cloth, and looking doubtful.

"Joseph, your papa's not in the way and I cannot speak to him—do you think I might venture to send something to poor Eliza under the circumstances?"

"Send, and risk it," said Tod, in his prompt manner. "*Of course.* As to the Pater—at the worst, he'll only storm a bit. But I fancy he would be the first to send help himself. He'd not let her die for the want of it."

"Then I'll despatch Hannah at once."

Hoar was down by the bed when Hannah got there, holding a drop of ale to his wife's lips. Mr. Cole was standing by with his hat on.

"*Ale!*" exclaimed Hannah to the surgeon. "May she take *that*?"

"Bless me, yes," said he, "and do her good."

Hannah followed him outside the door when he was leaving. "How will it go with her, sir?" she asked. "She looks dreadfully ill."

"Well," returned the doctor, "I think the night will about see the end of it."

The words frightened Hannah. "Oh, my goodness!" she cried. "What's the matter with her that she should die?"

"Famine and worry have been the matter with her. What she will die of is exhaustion. She has had a sharpish pull just now, you

understand ; and has no stamina to bring her up again."

It was late in the afternoon when Hannah came back home. There was no change, she said, for the better or the worse. Eliza still lay as much like one dead as alive.

" It's quite a picter to see the poor little creatures sitting on the bare floor and quiet as mice, never speaking but in a whisper," cried Hannah, as she shook the snow off her petticoats on the mat. " It's just as if they had an instinct of what is coming."

The Squire, far from being angry, wanted to send over half the house. It was not Eliza's fault, he said, it was the strike's—and he hoped with all his heart she'd get through it. Helping the men's wives in ordinary was not to be thought of; but when it came to dying, that was a different matter. In the evening, between dinner and tea, I offered to go over and see whether there was any progress. Being curious on the point themselves, they said yes.

The snow was coming down smartly. My great-coat and hat were soon white enough to be taken for a marching ghost enjoying the air at night. Knocking at the Hoars' door gently, it was opened by Jacky. He asked me to go in.

To my surprise they were again alone—Eliza and the children. Mrs. Watts had gone

home to put her own flock to bed ; and Hoar was out. 'Liza sat on the hearthstone, the sleeping bundle on her lap.

"Father's a-went to fetch Mr. Cole," said Jacky. "Mother began a talking queer—dreams, like—and it frightened him. He told us to mind her till he run back with the doctor."

Looking down, I thought she was delirious. Her eyes were wide open and shining : a scarlet spot shone on her cheeks. She began talking to me. Or rather to the air ; for I'm sure she knew no one.

"A great bright place it is, up there ; all alight with shining. Silvery, like the stars. Oh it's beautiful ! The people be in white, and no strikes can come in !"

"She've been a-talking about the strikes all along," whispered Jacky, who was kneeling on the mattress. "Mother ! Mother, would ye like a drop o' the wine ?"

Whether the word mother aroused her, or the boy's voice—and she had always loved Jacky with a great love—she seemed to recognize him. He raised her head as handy as could be, and held the tea-cup to her lips. It was half full of wine ; she drank it all by slow degrees, and revived to consciousness.

"Master Johnny !" she said then in a faint tone.

I could not help the tears filling my eyes as

I knelt down by her in Jacky's place. She knew she was dying. I tried to say a word or two.

"It's the leaving the children, Master Johnny, to strikes and things o' that kind, that's making it so hard for me to go. The world's full o' trouble: look at what ours has been since the strike set in! I'd not so much mind *that* for them, though—for the world here don't last over long, and perhaps it's a'most as good be miserable as easy in it—if I thought they'd all come to me in the bright place afterwards. But—when one's clammed with famine and what not, it's a sore temptation to do wrong. Lord, bring them to me!" she broke forth, suddenly clasping her hands. "Lord Jesus, pray for them, and save them!"

She was nothing but skin and bone. Her hands fell, and she began plucking at the outside blanket. You might have heard a pin drop in the room. The frightened children hardly breathed.

"I shall see your dear mamma, Master Johnny. I was at her death-bed; 'twas me mostly waited on her in her sickness. If ever a sainted lady went straight to heaven, 'twas her. When I stood over her grave I little thought my own ending was to be so soon. Strikes! Nothing but strikes—and famine, and bad tempers, and blows. Lord Jesus, wash us white from our sins, and take us all

to that better world ! No strikes there ; no strikes there."

She was going off her head again. The door opened, and Hoar, the doctor, and Mrs. Watts all came in together.

Mrs. Todhetley went over through the snow in the morning. Eliza Hoar had died in the night, and lay on the mattress, her shrunken face calm and peaceful. Hoar and the children had migrated to the kitchen at the back, a draughty place hardly large enough for the lot to turn round in. The eldest girl was trying to feed the baby with a tea-spoon.

" What are you giving it, Eliza ? " asked Mrs. Todhetley.

" Sugar and water, with a sup o' milk in't, please ma'am."

" I hope you are contented, Jacob Hoar, now you have killed your wife."

Very harsh words, those, for Mrs. Todhetley to speak : and she hastened to soften them. But, as she said afterwards, the matter altogether was a cruel folly and sin, making her heart burn with shame. " That is, Hoar, with the strike ; for it is the strike that has killed her."

Hoar, who had been sitting with his head up the chimney, noticing nobody, burst into a sudden flood of tears, and sobbed strongly for a minute or two. Mrs. Todhetley was giving the children a biscuit apiece from her bag.

"I did it all for the best," said Hoar, presently. "'Twasn't me that originated the strike. I but joined in it with the rest of my mates."

"And their wives and families are in no better plight than yours."

"Nobody can say I've not done my duty as a husband and a father," cried Hoar. "I've not been a drunkard, nor a rioter, nor a spend-thrift. I've never beat her nor swore at her, as some of 'em does."

"Well, she is lying *there*; and the strike has brought her to it. Is it so, or not?"

Hoar did not answer: only caught up his breath with a sound of pain.

"It seems to me, Hoar, that the strikes cannot be the good things you think for," she said, her voice now full of pity for the man. "They don't bring luck with them; on the contrary, they bring a vast deal of ill-luck. It is you workmen that suffer; mostly in your wives and children. I do not pretend to judge whether strikes may be good in a political point of view; I am not clever; but they do tell very hard upon your poor patient wives and little ones."

"And don't you see as they tell upon us men too!" he retorted with a sob, half pitiful, half savage. "Ay, and worst of all: for if they should be mistaken steps 'stead of right ones, we've got 'em on our conscience."

"But you go in for them, Hoar. You, individually: and this last night's blow is the result. It certainly seems that there must be a mistake somewhere."

This has not been much to tell of, but it is *true*; and, as strikes are all the go just now, I thought I would write out for you a corner scrap of ours. For my own part, I cannot see that strikes do much good in the long run; or at the best, that they are worth the cost. I do know, for I have heard and seen it, that through many a long day the poor wives and children can only cry aloud to heaven to have pity on them and their privations.

In course of time, the strike (it was the longest on record in our parts, though we have had a few since) came to an end. Upon which, the men began life again with bare homes, and sickly young ones; and some emptied chairs.

## XXIII.

## BURSTING-UP.

THERE have been fiery August days in plenty; but never a more fiery one than this that I am going to tell of. It was Wednesday: and we were sitting under the big tree of the lawn at Dyke Manor. A tree that would have done you good only to look at on a blazing day: a thick weeping ash, with a cool and shady green space inside it, large enough for a dozen chairs round, and a table in the middle.

The chairs and the tables were there now. On the latter stood iced cider and some fizzing lemonade: uncommonly good, both, on that thirsty day. Mr. Brandon, riding by on his cob, had called in to see us; and sat between me and Mrs. Todhetley. She was knitting something in shades of green wool. The Squire had a straw hat on; Tod lay on the grass outside, within the shade of the laurels; Hugh and Lena stood at the bench by him, blowing soap-bubbles and chattering like magpies.

"Well, I don't know," said old Brandon, taking a good draught of the lemonade. "It often happens with me if I plan to go anywhere

much beforehand, that when the time comes I am not well enough for it."

Mr. Todhetley had been telling him that he thought he should take the lot of us to the sea-side for a week or two in September ; and suggested that he should go with us. It had been a frightfully hot summer, and everybody felt worn out.

"Where shall you go?" questioned Mr. Brandon.

"Somewhere in Wales, I think," said the Squire. "It's easiest of access from here. Aberystwith, perhaps."

"Not much of a sea at Aberystwith," cried Mr. Brandon, in his squeaky voice.

"Well, it's not quite a Gibraltar Rock, Brandon ; but it does for us. The last time we went to the sea-side; it is three years ago now ——"

"Four," mildly put in Mrs. Todhetley, looking up from her woools.

"Four, is it ! Well, it was Aberystwith we went to then ; and we were very comfortably lodged. It was at a Mrs. Noon's, I remember ; and—who's coming now?"

A dash in at the entrance gate was heard—which a little startled Mr. Brandon, lest whatever it was should dash over his cob, tied to the gate-post—and then came the smooth run of light wheels on the gravel

"Look out and see who it is, Johnny."

Parting a place amid the leaves of the weep-

ing-ash, I saw a light, elegant, sweeping open carriage, driven by a groom in livery; a gentleman seated beside him in dainty gloves.

"Why, that's the Clement-Pells' little carriage!" exclaimed Mrs. Todhetley, who had been looking out for herself.

"And that's Mr. Clement-Pell in it," said I.

"Oh," said Mr. Brandon. "I'll go then." But the Squire put his arm out to keep him where he was.

Tod did the honours. Went to receive him, and brought him to us under the tree. The children stopped blowing their bubbles to stare at Mr. Clement-Pell as he crossed the lawn. It struck me that just a shade of annoyance appeared in his face when he saw so many of us there. Shaking hands, he sat down by Mr. Todhetley, observing that it was some time since he saw us. It was six weeks, or so: for we had not happened to meet since that visit of mine and Tod's to his house at Kensington. All the family were back again now at Parrifer Hall: and we were going to a grand entertainment there on the following day, Thursday. An open-air fête, the invitations had said.

"You have been very busy lately, Mr. Clement-Pell," observed the Squire. "I've not been able to get to see you to thank you for the kindness of your folks to my boys in town. Twice I called at your chief bank, but you were not visible."

"I have been unusually busy," was the answer. "Business gets worse; that is, larger; every day. I have had to be about a good deal besides; so that with one thing and another, my time has been more than fully occupied. I am very glad your young men enjoyed themselves with us in London," he added in a hearty tone.

Mr. Brandon gave me such a look that for the life of me I could not say a word in answer. The London visit, taking it comprehensively, had not been one of enjoyment: but Clement-Pell had no suspicion of the truth.

"Rather a *rapid* life, that London life," remarked Mr. Brandon dryly. And I went hot all over, for fear he might be going to let out things to the company.

"Rapid?" repeated Mr. Clement-Pell. "Well, so it is; especially for us business men."

Mr. Brandon coughed, but said no more. The Squire pressed the drinkables on Mr. Clement-Pell. He'd have nothing to say to the cider—it would make him hotter, he thought—but took a drop of the fizzing lemonade. As he was putting the glass down, Mrs. Todhetley asked whether the fête at his house on the morrow was to be as grand and large as reported. And the shade of annoyance, seen before, most certainly again crossed Clement-Pell's face at the question.

"I do not really know much about it," he

answered. "These affairs are my wife's, not mine."

"And perhaps you don't much care for them," put in the Squire, who had seen the expression.

"I should like them very much, if I had more time to spare for them," said Mr. Clement-Pell, playing with his handsome chain and seals. "We men of large undertakings must be content to work ourselves, and to let our wives and daughters play. However, I hope I shall get an hour or two for this one at home to-morrow."

"What are to be the amusements?" inquired Mrs. Todhetley.

"The question is, rather, what they are not to be," smiled Mr. Clement-Pell. "I heard the girls talking about it with one another last night. Dancing, music, archery, fortunetelling——"

"Something, I suppose, of what may be called a fancy fair," she interrupted.

"Just so. A fancy-fair without the money-taking. At any rate, I make no doubt it will be pleasant: and I sincerely hope to see you all at it. You will come, I trust, Mr. Brandon. These things are not in your ordinary line, I am aware, but——"

"I have neither the health nor the inclination for them," said Mr. Brandon, quite shrilly, stopping him before he could finish.

"But I do trust you will make an exception in favour of us to-morrow, I was about to say. Mrs. Clement-Pell and the Miss Clement-Pells will be so pleased to see you."

"Thank you," said old Brandon, in a short tone, only just saved from one of rudeness. "I must be going, Squire."

He got up as he spoke, shook hands with Mrs. Todhetley only, nodded to the rest of us, and set off across the lawn. Children liked him in spite of his voice and his dry manner, and of course Hugh and Lena, pipes and soap-suds and all, attended him to the gate.

As the brown cob went trotting off, and the Squire was coming back again—for he had gone too—Mr. Clement-Pell met him half-way across the lawn; and then they both went indoors together.

"Clement-Pell must want something," said Mrs. Todhetley. "Johnny, do you notice how very aged and worn he is? It never struck me until to-day. He looks quite grey."

"Well, that's because he is getting so. I shall be grey some time."

"But I don't mean that kind of greyness, Johnny; grey hairs. His *face* looks grey."

"It was the shade of these green leaves, good mother."

"Well—perhaps it might be," she doubtfully agreed, looking up. What a grand fête it is to be, Johnny!"

" You'll have to put on your best bib-and-tucker. That new dress you bought for the Sterlings' christening."

" I should if I went. But the fact is, Johnny, I and Mr. Todhetley have made up our minds not to go, I fancy. We were talking together about it this morning. However—we shall see when to-morrow comes."

" I'd not be you then. That will be too bad."

" These open-air fêtes are not in our way, Johnny. Dancing, and archery, and fortunetelling are not much in the way of us old people. You young ones think them delightful—as we did once. Hugh! Lena! what is all that noise about? You are not to take her bowl, Hugh: keep to your own. Joseph, please part them."

Joe accomplished it by boxing the two. In the midst of the noise, Mr. Clement-Pell came out. He did not cross the grass again to Mrs. Todhetley; just called out a good day in getting into his carriage, and lifted his hat as he drove away.

" I say, father, what did he want with you?" asked Tod, as the Squire came sauntering back, the skirts of his light coat held behind him.

" That's my business, Joe," said the Squire.  
" Mind your own."

Which was a checkmate for Tod. The truth was, Tod had been uneasily wondering whether it might not be his business. That is, whether

Mr. Clement-Pell had obtained scent of that gambling of his up in London and had come to enlighten the Squire. Tod never felt safe upon the point: which, you see, was all owing to his lively conscience.

"What a beautiful little carriage that is!" said Mrs. Todhetley to the Pater. "It puts me in mind of a shell."

"Ay; must have cost a pretty penny, small though it is. Pell can afford these fancy things, with his extent of floating wealth."

In that city of seething crowds and seething wealth, London, where gigantic operations are the rule instead of the exception, and large fortunes are made daily, Mr. Clement-Pell would not have been thought much of; but in our simple country place, with its quiet experiences, Clement-Pell was a wonder. His riches were great. His power of making money for himself and for others seemed elastic; and he was bowed down to as a reigning potentate,—a king,—an Olympian god.

You have heard of him before. He had come to a neighbouring town some years before as the manager of a small banking company, having given up, it was understood, a good law practice in London to undertake it. The small banking company grew into a large one under his management. Some of its superfluous hoards of gold were employed profitably: to lay down railroads; to work mines; to found colo-

nies. All sorts of paying concerns were said to have some of Clement-Pell's money in them, and to bring him in cent. per cent. It was believed that if all the wealth of the East India Company and the Bank of England to boot had been poured into the hands of Clement-Pell, it could not have been more than he would be able to use to profit, so great were the outlets at his command. People fought with one another to get their money accepted by Mr. Clement-Pell. No wonder. The funds gave them a paltry three, or three-and-a-half per cent for it : Mr. Clement-Pell doubled the amount. So the funds lost the money, and Mr. Clement-Pell gained it. He was worshipped as the greatest benefactor that had ever honoured the country by settling down in it.

I think his manner went for something. It was so pleasant. The world itself might have loved Mr. Clement-Pell. Deputations asked for his portrait to hang up in public buildings ; individuals besought his photograph. Mrs. Clement-Pell was less liked : she was extravagant and haughty. It was said she was of very high family indeed, and she could not have looked down upon common people with more scorn had she been a born duchess. I'm sure no duchess ever gave herself the airs that Mrs. Clement-Pell did, or wore bonnets as fine.

When Mr. Clement-Pell opened a little branch bank at Church Dykely (as he had already

done at two or three other small places), the parish at once ascended a few feet into the air. As Church Dykely in its insignificance had never possessed a bank before, it was naturally something to be proud of. The bank was a little house near to Duffham's, the doctor, with a door and one window ; no larger premises being obtainable ! The natives collected round to gaze, and marvel at the great doings destined to be enacted behind that wire blind : and Mr. Clement-Pell was followed by a small tail of admiring rustics whenever he stepped abroad.

Church Dykely only got its branch in what might be called the later years, dating from the beginning of the Clement-Pell dynasty, and when he had made a far and wide name, and was in the full tide of his prosperity. It was after its establishment that he took Parrifer Hall. This little branch bank was found to be a convenience to many people. It had a manager and a clerk ; and Mr. Clement-Pell would condescend to be at it occasionally, chiefly on Mondays. He was popular with all classes : county gentlemen and rich farmers asked him to dinner ; the poor got from him many a kind word and a handshake. Mrs. Clement-Pell dined with him at the gentlemen's tables, but she turned up her nose at the farmers, and would not go near them. In short, take them for all in all, there was no

family so grand in the county, or who made so much noise as the Clement-Pells. Their income was something enormous ; and of course they might launch out if they liked. It had grown to be a saying among us “ As rich as the Clement-Pells.”

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Mrs. Todhetley had said she supposed the entertainment would be something of a fancy-fair. We had not had an extensive experience of fancy-fairs in our county ; but if they were all like this, I’d not mind going to one twice a week. The sky was unclouded, the wind still, the leaves of the trees hardly fluttered. On the lawn the sun blazed down, hot and brilliant : but the groves were of a shady coolness. Since the place came in to Mr. Clement-Pell’s occupancy, he had taken in part of a side field, and made the grounds more extensive. At least, Mrs. Clement-Pell had, which came to the same : spending money went for nothing with her. And why should it, when they had so much ? If you swung yourself on to the top of an artificial mound of rock you could see over the high hedge. I did : and took a look at the chimneys of George Reed’s cottage. You’ve not forgotten him ; and his trouble with Major Parrifer. But for that trouble, the Clement-Pells might never have had the chance of occupying Parrifer Hall.

It was as good as fairy-land. Flags hung about ; banners waved ; statues had decked themselves in garlands. The lawns and the walks were alive with company, the ladies sported gala dresses all the colours of the rainbow. Dancing, shooting, flirting, talking, walking, sitting ; we were as gay as birds of paradise. There was a tent for the band, and another for refreshments, and no end of little marquees, dotted about, for anything. One was a post-office ; where love-letters might be had for the asking. When I look back on that day now through the mist of years, it stands out as the gayest and sunniest left to memory. As to the refreshments—you may think of anything you like and know it was there. There was no regular meal at all throughout the afternoon and evening ; but you could begin eating and drinking when you went in if you chose, and never leave off till you left. The refreshment tent communicated with one of the doors of the house, through which fresh supplies came as they were wanted. All was cold. Fish done in jelly ; meats ; poutries ; pies, and substantial things of that kind ; all sorts of tarts and cakes and sweet things ; ices, syllabubs, creams ; wines, syrups, lemonades ; champagne in abundance, sparkling hock and Burgundy. Besides this, there was a tea and coffee marquee, where the kettles were kept always on the boil. Nobody could say the Clement-

Pells spared pains or cost to entertain their guests right royally.

At the beginning, people showed themselves stiff and unapproachable, according to our English custom. Tod and I strolled about, feeling lonely enough, and staring around to take in the scene. The Clement-Pell carriages (the big barouche and the small affair that Mrs. Todhetley had called like a shell) came dashing up at intervals, graciously despatched to bring relays of guests who did not keep carriages of their own. Mrs. Clement-Pell stood on the lawn to receive them; the Miss Clement-Pells with her. If I were able to describe their attire I would, it beat anything for gorgeousness I had ever seen. Glistening skirts of silk under robes of beautiful lace; fans in their hands and gossamer veils in their hair.

“I say, Tod, here they come!”

A sober carriage was driving slowly in. We knew it well: and its steady old horses and servants too. It was Sir John Whitney’s. Rushing round a back path, we were up when it stopped. Bill Whitney and his two sisters came tumbling out of it.

“It’s going on to your house now, to take the trunk,” said Helen, to us. “William has been most awfully tiresome: he would put his every-day boots and coat in our box, instead of bringing a portmanteau for himself.”

"As if a fellow wanted a portmanteau for just one night!" exclaimed Bill. "What you girls can have got in that big trunk, amazes me. I should say you are bringing your bed and pillows in it."

"It has only our dresses for to-morrow morning in it, and that," retorted Helen, who liked to keep Bill in order and to domineer. "The idea of having to put in great clumsy dirty boots with *them*, and a rough coat smelling of smoke!"

"This is to be left here, I think, Miss Helen," said the footman, showing a small black leather bag.

"Goodness, yes; it has our combs and brushes in it," returned Helen, taking it and giving it to one of the Clement-Pell servants, together with two cloaks for the evening.

Tod went up to the postilion. "Look here, Pinner: the Squire says you had better stop at the Manor to bait the horses. You will find the groom there, I daresay."

"Thank you, sir," said Pinner. "They'll be a bit blown if we goes straight off back."

The girls and Bill went up to the Clement-Pell receiving group, and were made much of. It was the first time they had visited the Pells, and their coming was regarded as a special honour. Sir John and Lady Whitney had declined: and it was arranged that Bill and his

sisters should sleep at our house, and the carriage come for them the next day.

Escaping from the Pells, we all sat down on a bench. Helen Whitney began whispering about the Miss Pells' dresses.

"I never saw such beauties," she exclaimed.  
"I wonder what they cost?"

"Millions, I should say," cried Bill.

"These are but plain ugly old things beside them," grumbled Helen.

She meant her dress and Anna's. They had white spotted muslins on, tied with blue ribbons and blue buds in their bonnets. One of those gorgeous robes was worth fifty times as much: but I know which set of girls looked the most lady-like.

"They are very beautiful," sighed Helen, with a spice of envy. "But too much for an affair like this."

"Not for them," said Bill stoutly. "The Clement-Pells could afford a robe of diamonds if they like. I'm not sure but I shall go in for one of the girls."

"Don't talk nonsense," reproved Helen.

We went into the fortune-telling tent. It was full of people, screaming and laughing. A real gipsy with a swarthy skin and purple-black locks flowing down her back was telling the fortunes. Helen had hers told when she could get a place, and was promised a lord for a husband and five-and-thirty grandchildren.

At which the tent roared again, and Helen laughed too.

"And now it is your turn, my pretty little maid," said the sibyl to Anna Whitney. And Anna, always modest and gentle, turned as red as a rose, and said she knew already as much of her own fortune as she desired to know at present.

"What's in *this* hand?" cried the gipsy, suddenly seizing upon Tod's big one, and devouring its lines with her eyes. "Nay, master; don't draw it away, for there's matter here, and to spare. You are not afraid, are you?"

"Not of you, my gipsy queen," gallantly answered Tod, resigning to her his palm. "Pray let my fate be as good as you can."

"It is a smooth hand," she went on, never having lifted her gaze from it, and as if she did not hear him. "Very smooth: you'll not have many of the cares and crosses of life. Nevertheless, I see that you have been in some peril lately. And I should say it was connected with money. Debt."

There were not many things could bring the colour into Joseph Todhetley's face: but it matched then with the scarlet mantle the gipsy wore slung over her right shoulder. You might have heard a pin drop in the sudden hush. Anna's blue eyes were glancing shyly up through their long lashes.

"Peril of debt, or—perhaps—of—steeple-

chasing," continued the sibyl with intense deliberation; and at that the shouts of laughter broke out again through the tent, and Anna smiled. "Take you care of yourself, sir; for I perceive you will run into other perils before you settle down. You have neither caution nor foresight."

"That's true enough, I believe," said Tod.  
"Any more?"

"No more. For you are just one of those imprudent mortals who will never pay heed to friendly warnings of danger. Were I you, I'd keep out of the world till I grew older."

"Thank you," said Tod, laughing as much as the rest of them: and she threw away his hand.

"Johnny, that was a near shave," he whispered, putting his arm within mine when we had pushed our way out. "Was it all guesswork? Who the deuce is the woman?"

"I know who *I* think she is. The Pells' English governess, Miss Phebus."

"Nonsense!"

"I do. She has got herself up in character and dyed her skin and hair."

"Then, by George, if it *is*, she must have gathered an inkling of that matter in London."

"I don't see how."

"Nor I. Johnny, some of these days I shall be bursting out with it to the Pater, and so get the weight off my mind."

"I shouldn't wonder. She says you have no caution."

"It's not pleasant, I can tell you, youngster, to live in the dread that somebody else will bring it out to him. I'll go in for this next dance, I think. Where's Anna?"

Anna did not say no. She would never say no to anything *he* asked her, if I possessed the gift of divination. They joined the dancers; Bill and Helen went to the archery.

"And how are *you* enjoying it pray, Johnny Ludlow?"

The voice nearly shot me off the arm of the bench. For it was Mr. Brandon's. I don't think there was any living man I should have been so surprised at seeing at the fête as he.

"Why! is it you, sir?"

"Yes, it is, Johnny. You need not stare as if you thought me an intruder. I was invited."

"Yes, of course, sir. But I—I fancied you never came to such parties."

"Never was at one like this—unless I went to it in my sleep," he said, standing with me before the bench, and casting his eyes around. "I came to-day to look after you."

"After me, sir!"

"Yes, after you. And perhaps a little bit after your friend, Todhetley. Mr. Pell informed us the entertainments would include fortunetelling: I didn't know but there might be a

roulette table as well. Or cards, or dice, or billiards."

"Oh no, sir ; there's nothing of that."

"It's not the fault of the young Pells, I expect, then. That choice companion of yours, called Gusty, and the other one in scarlet."

"Neither of them is here, Mr. Brandon. Gusty is gone to the Highlands for the grouse-shooting ; and Fabian sent word down he couldn't get leave. I have not seen the eldest son yet, but I suppose he is somewhere about."

"Oh," said Mr. Brandon—and whenever he spoke of the Pells his voice was thin to a degree and most decidedly took a mocking sound—"gone grouse-shooting, is Gusty ! And the other can't get leave. A lieutenant, is he not ? "

"Yes, he's a lieutenant. His sister Constance has just told us she does not believe it is true that he could not get leave. She thinks he never asked for it, because he wanted to stay in London."

"Ah. It's fine to be the Pells, Johnny. One son off to shoot grouse ; another living his fast<sup>1</sup> London life ; the rest holding grand doings down here that could hardly be matched by the first nobleman among us. Very fine. Wonder what they spend a year—taking it in the aggregate ? "

"Have you been here long, sir ? "

"Half an hour, or so. I've been looking

about me, Johnny, and listening to the champagne corks popping off. Squire here?"

"No. He and Mrs. Todhetley did not come."

"Sensible people. Where's young Joe?"

"He is with the Whitneys. Dancing with Anna, I think."

"And he had better keep to that," said Mr. Brandon with a little nod. "He'll get no harm there."

We sat down, side by side. Taking a glance at him sideways, I saw his eyes fixed on Mrs. and the Miss Clement-Pells, who were now mixing with the company. He did not know much about ladies' dress, but theirs seemed to strike him.

"Showy, Johnny, is it not?"

"It looks very bright in the sun, sir."

"No doubt. So do spangles."

"It's real, sir, that lace. Helen Whitney says so."

"A great deal too real. So is the rest of it. Hark at the music and the corks and the laughter! Look at the people, and the folly!"

"Don't you like the fête, sir?"

"Johnny, I hate it with my whole heart."

I was silent. Mr. Brandon was always queerer than other people.

"Is it in *keeping* with the Pells, this grandeur and upstart profusion? Come, Johnny Ludlow, you've got some sense in your head: answer me. They have both risen from nothing,

Johnny. When he began life, Pell's best ambition was to rise to a competency ; an el dorado of three or four hundred a year : and that only when he had worked for it. I have seen her take in the milk for their tea from the milkman at the door ; when they kept one servant to do everything. Pell rose by degrees and grew rich ; so much the more credit to his perseverance and his business talents——”

“ And would you not have them spend their riches, Mr. Brandon ? ”

“ Spend their riches !—of course I would, in a proper way. Don't you interrupt your elders, Johnny Ludlow. Where would be the use of a man's getting money unless he spent some ? But not in *this* way ; not in the lavish and absurd and sinful profusion that they have indulged in of late years. Is it seemly, or right, or decent, the way they've lived in ? The sons apeing the manners and company of their betters, of young fellows who are born to the peerage and to their thousands a year ? The mother holding her head in the air as if she had on an iron collar : the daughters with their carriages and their harps and their German governesses, and their costly furbelows that are a scandal on common sense ? The world has run mad after these Pells of late years : but I know this much—I have been ashamed only to look on at the Pells' unseemly folly.”

At that moment Martha Jane Pell—in the

toilette that Bill Whitney said must have cost " millions "—went looming by, flirting with Captain Connaught. Mr. Brandon looked after them with his little eyes.

" They are too fine for their station, Johnny. They were not born to this kind of thing ; were not reared to it ; have only plunged into it of recent years, and it does not sit well upon them. One can but think of upstarts all the while. The Pells might have lived as gentle-people ; ay, and married their children to gentlemen and gentlewomen had they pleased : but, to launch out in this unseemly way, has been just a humiliation to themselves, and has rendered them a poor, pitiful laughing-stock in the eyes of all right-minded people. It's nothing less than a burlesque on all the proprieties of life. And it may be that we have not seen the end of it, Johnny."

" Well, sir, they can hardly be grander than——"

" Say more assumptious, lad. If there is such a word."

" I suppose I meant that, Mr. Brandon. Perhaps you think they'll be for taking the Marquis's place, Ragley, next, if it should come into the letting market. Or Eastnor Castle :—or——"

" I did not mean exactly in that way, Johnny," he interrupted again, with a queer look on his thin lips as he got up.

"Are you going into the eating tent, sir?"

"I am going away. Now that I have seen you and Joe Todhetley are tolerably safe from gaming tables and the like, there's nothing further for me to do here. I feel a kind of responsibility upon me in regard to you two, seeing that that unpleasant secret lies with me, and not with Joe's father."

"It is early to go, sir. The fun has hardly begun."

"None too early for me. I am a magistrate; looked up to, in a sort, in the neighbourhood, insignificant though I am. It is not I that will countenance this upstart foolery by my presence longer than I can help, Johnny Ludlow."

Mr. Brandon disappeared. The hours went on to dusk and then to dark. Once during the evening I caught sight of Mr. Clement-Pell: and what occurred as I did so was like a bit of romance. People crowded the side paths under the light of the Chinese coloured lanterns. For lanterns were hanging on the trees and shrubs, and the whole scene was like one of enchantment copied out of the Arabian nights. One of the remote walks was not lighted; perhaps it had been forgotten. I had missed Bill Whitney and was at the extreme end of the grounds hunting for him, when I saw, slantwise through the trees, a solitary figure pacing this dark walk with his arms folded. It was not

very likely to be Bill : but there was no harm in going to see.

It turned out to be Mr. Clement-Pell. But before I got out of the intersecting trees and into the walk—for it was the nearest way back to the lights and company—somebody pushed through the trees on the opposite side the path, and stood in front of him. The moon shone as much as an August moon ever does shine ; the light of the sky—very light that night—flickered down through the branches : and I saw Clement-Pell give a start, as if he had been told his house was on fire.

“ I thought this might be a good place to find you,” cried the stranger in a low whisper that had a savage tone in it. “ You have kept out of my way two days at the bank—too busy to see me, eh ?—so, hearing what was going on over here, I took the train and came.”

“ I’m sure I am—happy to see you, Mr. Johnson,” cried Clement-Pell in a voice that seemed to shake a little ; and unless the light was in fault, he had turned as pale as a ghost. “ Would have sent you an invitation had I known you were down.”

“ I daresay you would ! I did not come to attend festivals, Pell, but to settle business.”

“ You must be aware I cannot attend to business to-night,” interrupted Clement-Pell. “ Neither do I ever enter upon it at my private

residence. I will see you to-morrow at eleven at the bank."

"Honour bright? Or is it a false plea, put forth to shuffle me off now?"

"I will see you to-morrow morning at the bank at eleven o'clock," repeated Clement-Pell, decisively and emphatically. "We are very busy just now, and I must be there the first thing. And now, Mr. Johnson, if you will go into the refreshment tent, and make yourself at home——"

"No refreshments for me, thank you: I must hasten away to catch the train. But first of all, I will put a question to you: and answer it you must, whether it is your habit of entering on business at home, or whether it is not. Is it true that——"

I did not want to hear more of their secrets, and went crashing through the trees with a noise. I should have gone before, but for not liking them to know anyone was there. They turned round.

"Oh, is it you, Mr. Ludlow?" cried Pell, putting out his hand as I passed them.

"Yes, sir. I am looking for young Whitney. Have you seen him?"

"I think I saw him at the door of one of the tents, just now. You'll find him among the company, I daresay. The Squire and Mrs. Todhetley are not come, I hear."

"No, sir."

"Ah well—give my very kind regards to them, and say I am sorry. I hope you are taking care of yourself—in the way of refreshments."

The stranger and I had stood facing each other during this. He was a very peculiar-looking man with an open stare; black hair, white whiskers, and very short legs. I thought it was anything but manners of him to come over, as he had confessed to have done, and disturb Clement-Pell at such a time.

At nine o'clock Giles arrived with the pony carriage for the young ladies and two of us: the other one and Giles were to walk. But we didn't see the fun of leaving so early. Giles said he could not wait long: he must be back to get old Jacobson's gig ready, who was spending the evening at the Manor. The Jacobsons, being farmers, though they were wealthy, and lived in good old style, had been passed over when Mrs. Clement-Pell's invitations went out. So Tod sent Giles and the carriage back again, with a message that we all preferred walking, and should follow shortly.

Follow, we did; but not shortly. It was past eleven when we got away. The dancing had been good, and nobody was at hand to say we must quit it. Helen and Anna Whitney came out with their cloaks on, and their muslin frocks pinned up. What with the dancing and the natural sultriness of the weather, the night

was about as hot as an oven. We were nearly the last to leave: but did not mean to say so at home. It was a splendid night, though; very clear, the moon larger than usual. We went on in no particular order: the five of us turning out of the Parrifer gates in a heap together.

"Oh," screamed Helen, when we were some yards down the road, "where's the bag? Anna, have you brought the bag?"

"No," replied Anna. "You told me you would bring it."

"Well—I meant to. William, you must run back for it."

"Oh bother the bag," said Bill. "You girls can't want the bag to-night. I'll come over for it in the morning."

"Not want it!—Why, our combs and brushes and thin shoes are in it," retorted Helen. "It is on a chair in that little room off the hall. Come, you go, William."

"I'll go, Helen," I said. "Walk quietly on, and I shall catch you up."

The grounds looked quite deserted then: the Chinese lanterns had burned themselves out, and the doors appeared to be shut. One of the side windows was open and gay with light; I thought it would be less trouble to enter that way, and leaped up the balcony steps to the empty room. Empty, as I took it to be.

Well, it was a kind of shock. The table had

a desk and a heap of papers on it, and on the top of all lay a man's head. The face was hidden in his hands, but he lifted it as I went in.

It was Clement-Pell. But I declare that at the first moment I did not know him. If ever you saw a face more haggard than other faces, it was his. He sat bolt upright in his chair then, and stared at me like one in awful fear.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I did not know any one was here."

"Oh it is you," he said, and broke out into a smile—which somehow made the face look even more worn and weary. "I thought you had all left."

"So we have, sir. But Miss Whitney forgot her bag, and I have run back for it. She left it in the small room in the hall."

"Oh ay, all right," he said. "You can go and get it, and run out this way again if you like. I dare say the hall door is closed."

"Good night, sir," I said, coming back with the bag. "We have had a most delightful day, Mr. Clement-Pell, and I'm sure we ought to thank you for it."

"I am glad it has been pleasant. Goodnight."

The trees were pretty thick on this side the house. In passing a grove of them a few paces from the window, I saw something that was neither trunks nor leaves; but Mr. Johnson's face garnished with its black hair and white

whiskers. He was hiding amid the trees, his face peeping out to look at the room and at Clement-Pell.

It made me feel queer. It made me think of treachery. Though what treachery, or where, I hardly knew. Not a trace was to be seen of the face now: he drew it in; no doubt to let me pass. Ought I to warn Mr. Pell that he was being watched? I had distinctly heard the man say he was going away directly: why had he stayed? Yes, it would be right and kind. Walking a bit further, I then quietly turned back.

Clement-Pell had a pen in his hand this time, and was poring over what seemed to be a big account book, or ledger. He looked surprised again, but spoke quietly.

"Still left something behind you, Mr. Ludlow?"

"No, sir, not this time," I said, putting myself against the shelter of the wall beyond the window, so as not to be seen without, and speaking below my breath. "I thought I would come back and tell you, Mr. Pell, that there's somebody outside watching this room. If——"

I broke off in sheer astonishment. He started up from his chair and came creeping to the wall where I stood, to hide himself as it seemed from the watcher, his haggard cheeks whiter than snow. But he put a good face on it to me.

"I could not hear you," he whispered.  
"What did you say? some one watching?"

"It is the same man I saw you talking to in the dark walk to-night, with the black hair and white whiskers. Perhaps he means no harm, sir; he is hiding in the trees, just his eyes peeping out to look in here."

"You are sure it is that same man?" he asked with an air of relief.

"Quite sure."

"Then it is all right. Mr. Johnson is an eccentric friend of mine. Rather—in fact, rather given to take at times more than is good for him. I suppose he has been going in for the champagne. I—I thought it might be some bad character."

It might be "all right," as Mr. Pell said: I fancied, by the relief in his tone, that it *was*: but I felt quite sure that he had cause to fear, if not Mr. Johnson, somebody else. At that moment there arose a slight rustle of leaves outside, and he stood, holding his breath to listen, his finger up. The damp smell of the shrubs was borne freely in on the night air.

"It is only the wind: there must be a little breeze getting up," said Mr. Clement-Pell.  
"Thank you; and good night. Oh, by the way, don't talk of this, Mr. Ludlow. If Johnson *has* been exceeding, he would not like to hear of it again."

"No fear, sir. Once more, good night."

Before I had well leaped the steps of the balcony, the window, a very heavy one, was put down with a bang, and then the shutters were closed. Taking a glance back, I saw the white face of Clement-Pell through the final opening, and heard the bolts shot. What could he be afraid of? Perhaps Johnson turned mad when he took drink. Some men do.

"Have you been making that bag, Johnny?" they called out when I caught them up.

"No."

"I'm sure it was on the chair," said Helen.

"Oh I found it at once. I stayed talking with Mr. Pell. I say, has the night grown damp?—or is it my fancy?"

"What does it matter?" returned Bill Whitney. "I wish I was in a bath, for my part, if it was only one of cold water."

The Squire stood at the end of the garden when we got home, with old Jacobson, whose gig was waiting. After reproaching us with our sins, first for sending the carriage home empty, then for being so late, the Squire came round and asked all about the party. Old Jacobson drew in his lips as he listened.

"It's fine to be the Clement-Pells!" cried he. "Why, a Duke-Royal could not give a grander party than that. Real lace for gowns, had they! No wonder Madame Pell turns her nose up at farmers?"

"Did Clement-Pell send me any particular message?" asked the Pater.

"He sent his kind regards," I said. "And he was sorry you and Mrs. Todhetley did not go."

"It was a charming party," cried Helen Whitney. "Papa and mamma put it to us, when the invitation came—would we go, or would we not go. They don't much care for the Clement-Pells. I am glad we did go: I would not have missed it for the world. But there's something about the Clement-Pells that tells you they are not gentlepeople."

"Oh, that's the show and finery," said Bill.

"No, I think it lies more in their tones and manner of speaking," said Helen.

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"Johnny, are you *quite* sure Clement-Pell sent me no message, except kind regards, and that?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Well, it's very odd."

"What is odd, sir?"

"Never you mind, Johnny."

This was after breakfast on the Saturday morning. The Squire was opening a letter that the post had brought, and looked up to ask me. Not that the letter had anything to do with Clement-Pell, for it only enclosed the bill for some ironmongery bought at Evesham.

On the Friday the Whitneys had gone home, and Tod with them. So I was alone : with nothing to do but wish him back again.

"I am going to Alcester, Johnny," said the Pater, in the course of the morning. "You can come with me if you like."

"Then will you please bring me back some money," cried Mrs. Todhetley. "You will pass the bank, I suppose."

"It's where I am going," returned the Pater : and I thought his voice had rather a grumbling tone in it.

We took the pony carriage ; and he let me drive. It was as hot as ever ; and the Squire wondered when autumn coolness would be coming in. Old Brandon happened to be at his gate as we went by, and the Pater told me to pull up.

"Going in to Alcester ?" cried Mr. Brandon.

"Just as far as the bank," said the Pater. "So I hear you went to the Clement-Pells' after all, Brandon."

"I looked in to see what it was like," said old Brandon, giving me a minute's hard stare : as much as to recall to my mind what had really taken him there.

"It was a dashing affair I hear."

"Rather too much so for me," cried Mr. Brandon drily. "Where's your son, sir ?"

"Oh, he's gone home with the Whitneys' young folks. How hot it is to-day !"

"Ay. Too hot to stand long in it. Drive on, Johnny."

The Squire went in to the bank alone, leaving me with the carriage. He banked with the Old Bank at Worcester; but it was a convenience to have some little money nearer in case of need, and he had recently opened a small account at Alcester. Upon which, Clement-Pell had said he might as well have opened it with him, at his Church Dykely branch. But the Squire explained that he had as good as promised the Alcester people, years ago, that if he did open an account nearer than Worcester it should be with them. He came out, looking rather glum, stuffing some notes into his pocket-book.

"Turn the pony round, Johnny," said he. "We'll go back. It's too hot to stay out to-day."

"Yes, sir. Is anything the matter?"

"Anything the matter! No. Why do you ask that?"

"I thought you looked put out, sir."

"There's nothing the matter. Only I think men of business should not be troubled with short memories. Take care of that waggon. What's the fellow galloping his horses at that rate for? Now, Johnny, I say, you take care. Or else, give me the reins."

I nearly laughed. At home they never seemed to think I could do anything. If they did let

me drive, it was always Now take care of this, Johnny ; or Take care of that. And yet I was a more careful driver than Tod : though I might not have had so much strength as he to pull up a four-in-hand team had it run away.

“ Go round through Church Dykely, Johnny, and stop at Pell’s bank,” said the Squire, as I was turning off on the direct road home.

I turned the pony’s head accordingly. It took us about a mile out of our way. The pavement was so narrow and the bank room so small, that I heard all that passed when the Squire went in.

“ Is Mr. Clement-Pell here ? ”

“ Oh dear no, sir,” replied the manager. “ He is always at the bank-in-chief on a Saturday. Did you want him ? ”

“ Not particularly. Tell him I think he must have forgotten to send to me.”

“ I’ll tell him, sir. He may look in here to-night on his return. If you wish to see him yourself, he will be here all day on Monday.”

The Squire came out and got in again. Cutting round the sharp corner by Perkins the butcher’s, I nearly cut into Mrs. and the Miss Clement-Pells, who were crossing the dusty road in a line like geese, the one before the other ; their muslins sweeping the highway like so many brooms, and their complexions sheltered under point lace parasols.

“ There you go again, Johnny ! Pull up, sir.”

I pulled up : and the heads came out from under the parasols, and gathered into a group to speak to us. They had quite recovered Thursday's fatigue, Mrs. Clement-Pell graciously said, in answer to the Squire's inquiries ; and she hoped all her young friends had done the same, Mr. Todhetley's young friends in particular.

"*They* felt no fatigue," cried the Pater. "Why, ma'am, they'd keep anything of that sort up for a week and a day, and not feel any. How's Mr. Clement-Pell ?"

"He is as well as he allows himself to be," she answered. "I tell him he is wearing himself out with work. His business is of vast magnitude, Mr. Todhetley. Good day."

"So it is," acquiesced the Pater as we drove on, partly to himself, partly to me. "Of vast magnitude. For my part, I'd rather do less, although it did involve less returns. One can forgive a man, like him, forgetting trifles. And, Johnny, I shouldn't wonder but that his enormous riches render him careless of small obligations."

Part of which was to me unintelligible.

Sunday passed. We nodded to the Miss Clement-Pells at church (their bonnets making the pew look like a garden of flowers) ; but did not see Mr. Clement-Pell or his wife. Monday passed ; bringing a note from Tod, to say Lady Whitney and Bill would not let him leave yet.

Tuesday morning came in. I happened to be seated under the hedge in the kitchen garden, mending a fishing-rod, when a horse dashed up to the back gate. Looking through, I saw it was the butcher's boy, Sam Rimmer. A shiny-headed young man, who preferred to ride without a hat and without a saddle, and generally had a big basket held before him. Molly, who was in one of her stinging tempers that morning, came out.

"We don't want nothing," said she tartly. "So you might have spared yourself the pains of coming."

"Don't want nothing!" returned Perkins's boy. "Why's that?"

"Why's that!" she retorted. "It's like your imperence to ask. Do families want joints every day; specially such weather as this? I'm a-going to cook fowls for 'em in the parlour, and we've got the cold round o' beef for the kitchen. Now your know why, Sam Rimmer."

Sam Rimmer sat looking at her as if in a quandary, gently rubbing his hair, that shone again in the sun.

"Well, it's a pity but you wanted some," said he, slowly. "We've gone and been and pervided a shop full o' meat to-day, and it'll be a dead loss on the master. The Clement-Pells don't want none, you see: and they took a'most as much as all the rest o' the

gentlefolks put together. There's summat up there."

" Summat up where?" snapped Molly.

" At the Clement-Pells'. The talk is, that they've busted up, and be all gone off in con-sekence."

" Why, what d'ye mean?" cried Molly.

" Gone off where? Busted up from what?"

But, before Perkins's boy could answer, the Pater, walking about the path in his straw hat and light thin summer coat, came on the scene. He had caught the words.

" What's that you are saying about the Clement-Pells, Sam Rimmer?"

Sam Rimmer touched his shiny hair, and explained. Upon going to Parrifer Hall for orders, he had found it all at sixes and sevens ; some of the servants gone, the rest going. They told him their master had bursted-up, and was gone away since Sunday morning ; and the family since Monday morning. And his master, Perkins, would have all the meat left on his hands, that he had killed on purpose for the Clement-Pells.

You should have seen the Squire's amazed face. At first he did not know how to take the words, and stared at Sam Rimmer without speaking.

" All the banks has went and busted up too," said Sam. " They be a-saying, sir, as how there won't be nothing for nobody."

The Squire understood now. He turned tail and rushed into the house. And rushed against Mr. Brandon, who was coming in.

"Well, have you heard the news?" asked Mr. Brandon in his thinnest voice.

"I can't believe it; I don't believe it," raved the Squire. "Clement-Pell would never be such a swindler. He owes me two hundred pounds."

Mr. Brandon opened his little eyes. "Owes it *you*!"

"That day, last week, when he came driving in, in his smart cockle-shell carriage—when you were here, you know, Brandon. He got a cheque for two hundred pounds from me. A parcel of money that ought to have come over from the chief bank had not arrived, he said, and the Church Dykely branch might be run close; would I let him have a cheque for two or three hundred pounds on the bank at Alcester. I told him I did not believe I had anything like two hundred pounds lying at Alcester: but I drew a cheque out for that amount, and wrote a note telling the people there to cash it, and I would make it right."

"And Pell drove straight off to Alcester then and there, and cashed the cheque?" said Mr. Brandon in his cynical way.

"He did. He had told me I should receive the money on the following day. It did not come, or on the Friday either; and on Satur-

day I went to Alcester, thinking he might have paid it in there."

" Which of course he had not," returned old Brandon. " Well, you must have been foolish, to be so taken-in."

" Taken-in ! " roared the Squire, in a passion. " Why, if he had asked me for two thousand pounds he might have had it—a man of the riches of Clement-Pell."

" Well, he'd not have got any from me. One who launched out as he did, and let his family launch out, I should never put much trust in. Any way, the riches are nowhere; and it is said Pell is nowhere too."

It was all true. As Sam Rimmer put it, Clement-Pell and his banks had bursted-up.

## XXIV.

## GETTING AWAY.

YOU have heard of avalanches of snow, that fall without warning and crush luckless wayfarers in the Swiss mountains,—and of mälströms that suddenly swallow up unsuspecting vessels, sailing jauntily along on a calm sea,—and of railway trains, filled with gleesome passengers, that one minute are running smoothly and safely along, and the next are nowhere; but nothing of all this ever created the consternation that attended the bursting-up of the Clement-Pells.

It was Saturday night.—For we have to trace back a day or two.—Seated in the same room where I had seen him when I ran back for Helen Whitney's bag, was Clement-Pell. That the man had come to his last gasp, he knew better than any one else in the world could have told him. How he had braved it out, and fought against the stream, and still kept off the explosion since the night but one before—Thursday—when Mr. Johnson had intruded himself into the grounds and then stealthily

watched him from amid the trees, and he knew all was over, it might have puzzled him to tell. How he had fought against all for months, ay, and years, turned him sick only to recall. It had been a fierce, continuous, secret battle ; and it had nearly worn him out, and turned his face and his hair grey before their time.

On the day following this fête-night, Friday, Clement-Pell took the train and was at his chief bank early. He held his interview with Mr. Johnson ; he saw other people ; and his manner was free and open as usual. On this next day, Saturday, he had been denied to nearly all callers at the bank : he was too busy to be interrupted, he told his clerks : and his son James boldly made appointments with them in his name for the Monday. After dark on Saturday evening, by the last train, he reached his home, Parrifer Hall. And there he was, in that room of his; the door and shutters bolted and barred upon him, alternately pacing it in what looked like tribulation, and bending over account-books by the light of two wax candles.

Leaning his forehead on his hand, he sat there, and thought it out. He strove to look at the situation fully ; what it was, and what it would be. Ruin, and worse than ruin. Clement-Pell had owned good principles once : so to say, he owned them still. But he had allowed circumstances to get the better of him

and of them. He had come from his distant home (supposed to have been London) as the humble manager of an insignificant and humble little bank : that was years ago. It was only a venture : but a certain slice of luck, that need not be told of here, favoured him, and he got on beyond his best expectations. He might have made an excellent living, nay, a good fortune, and kept his family as gentlepeople, had he been prudent. But the good luck, coming suddenly, turned his head, you see. Since then, I, Johnny Ludlow, who am no longer the inexperienced boy of that past time, have known it turn the heads of others. He launched out into ventures, his family launched into expense. The ventures paid ; the undue expense did not pay. When matters came to be summed up by a raging public, it was said that it was this expense which had swamped the Pells. That alone, I suppose, it could not have been : but it must have gone some way towards it.

It lay on his mind heavily that Saturday night. Looking back, he got wondering how much more, in round figures, his family had cost him than they ought to have cost. There had been his wife's different expenses : her houses, and her staff of servants, her carriages and horses, her dresses and jewels, and all the rest that it would take too long to tell of ; and the costly bringing-up of his daughters ; and

the frightful outlay of his two younger sons. Fabian and Gusty Pell ought to have had ten thousand a year each, to have justified it. James had his expenses too, but in a quieter way. Clement-Pell ran his nervous fingers through his damp hair, as he thought of this, and in his bitter mind told himself that his family had ruined him. Unlimited spending,—show,—the shooting up above their station! He gave a curse to it now. He had not checked it when he might have checked; and it (or they) got the upper hand, and then he could not. Nothing is so difficult as to put down expenses like these when they have been made the custom, and get ahead.

And so the years had soon come that he found need of supplies. Unlimited as his millions were supposed to be by a confiding public, Clement-Pell in secret wanted money worse than most people. His operations were gigantic, but then they required gigantic funds to keep them going. Money was necessary—or the smash must have come two or three years earlier. But money sufficient was not then conveniently attainable by Clement-Pell: and so—he created some. He believed when all his returns from these gigantic operations should flow in, that he could redeem the act; could replace the money, and nobody ever be the wiser. But (it is the old story, one

that has been enacted before and since), he found somehow that he could not replace it. Like Tod and that gambling affair when we were in London, in trying to redeem himself, he only got further into the mire. Tod, in playing on to cover his losses, doubled them ; Clement-Pell's fresh ventures in the stream of speculation only sent him into deeper water. Of late, Clement-Pell had had his footing as on a red-hot ploughshare. It burnt and scorched him everlastingily, and he could not get off it. But the end had come. The thunder-cloud so long hovering in the air was on the very point of bursting, and he was not able to meet it. He must get away: he could not stay to face it.

Get away for good, as he hoped, never to be tracked by friends or foes. What his future life was to be he did not venture to consider : he only knew that he would give all he ever had been worth to be able to live on, no matter how quietly, with his fellow-men around him. The little home of moderate competence that he and his wife had once looked to as the haven of their desires, would have been a blissful harbour of security and pride to him now.

Say what you will, men do not like to be shown up as black sheep in the eyes of their fellows ; especially if they have hitherto stood out as conspicuously white leaders of the flock.

The contrast is so great, the fall so startling. The public gives them all sorts of hard names; as it did in the case of Clement-Pell. A desperately hardened man he must be, said the world, with a brazen conscience; unprincipled as—well, yes, as Satan. But we may be very sure of one thing—that upon none does the disgrace tell so keenly, the ruin so heavily, the sense of shame so cruelly, as on these men themselves. Put it, if you will, that they make a purse of all their pockets, and carry it off to set up a new home in some foreign land—they carry their sense of humiliation with them also; and their sun of happiness in this life has set. Men have tried this before now, and died of it.

That was the *best* that lay prospectively before Clement-Pell: what the worst might be, he did not dare to dwell upon. Certain ugly possibilities danced in his mental vision, like so many whirling ballet girls. “If I can but get away!” he muttered; “if I can but get away!”

He tried to confine his whole attention to the ledgers before him, and he put on his spectacles again. Mental trouble and mental work will dim the sight as well as whiten the hair and line the face, and Clement-Pell could not see as he did a year before. He altered figures; he introduced entries; he tore out whole leaves, and made a bonfire of them in

the grate,—carefully removing from the grate first of all its flowing ornament of paper. One book he burnt wholesale, even to the covers; and the covers made a frightful smell and daunted him.

Money was wanted of him here, there, everywhere. Snatching a piece of paper he idly dotted down the large sums occurring to him at the moment; and quite laughed as he glanced at the total. These were only business liabilities. At his elbow lay a pile of bills as high as a haystack: domestic and family debts. House rent, taxes, horses, carriages, servants' wages, bills for food, and bills for attire: all running back a long while; for nobody had pressed Clement-Pell. The outlay for the *fête* might well have been profuse, since none of it was paid for. Beside the bills, lay letters from Fabian and Gusty — wanting money as usual. To the whole of these he scarcely gave a thought: they were nothing. Even though he were made bankrupt upon them, they were still as nothing: for they would not brand his brow with the word— felon. And he knew that there were other claims, of which no record appeared here, that might not be so easily wiped out.

Just for a moment, he lost himself in a happy reverie of what might have been had he himself been wise and prudent. It was Gusty's pressing letter that induced the reflection. He

saw himself a prosperous man of moderate expenses and moderate desires, living at his ease in his own proper station, instead of apeing the great world above him. His daughters reared to be good and thoughtful women, his sons to be steady and diligent whatever their calling, whether of business or profession. And what were they? "Curse the money and the apeing pride that deluded me and my wife to blindness!" broke with a groan from the lips of Clement-Pell.

A hard, sharp knocking at the door made him start. He looked about to see if there were anything to throw over his tell-tale table of books, and had a great mind to take off his coat and fling it there. Catching up the ornamental paper of the grate to replace it if he could, the knocking came again, and with it his wife's voice, asking what that smell of burning was. He let her in, and bolted the door again.

How far Mrs. Clement-Pell had been acquainted with his position, never came out to the world. That she must have known something of it was thought to be certain; and perhaps the additional launching out lately—the sojourn at Kensington, the fête, and all the rest of it—had only been entered upon to disarm suspicion. Shut up together in that room, they no doubt planned jointly the getting-away. That Mrs. Clement-Pell fought against

the leaving of home and of grandeur, to become fugitives, flying away in secret like so many scapegoats, would be only natural: we should all so fight: but he must have shown her there was no help for it. When she quitted the room again, she looked like one over whom twenty years had passed—as Miss Phebus told us later. And the whole of that night, Mrs. Clement-Pell never went to bed; but was in her room gathering things together barefoot, lest her shoes should be heard. Jewels—dresses—valuables! It must have been an awful night; deciding what of her possessions she should take, and what leave for ever.

At six in the morning, Sunday, Mr. Clement-Pell's chamber-bell rang, and the groom was summoned. He was bade get the small open carriage ready to drive his master to the railway station to catch an early train. Being Sunday, early trains were not common. Mr. Clement-Pell had received news the previous night, as was intimated, of an uncle's illness. At that early hour, and Sunday besides, Clement-Pell must have thought he was safe from meeting people: but, as it happened (things do happen unexpectedly in this world), in bowling out at his own gates, he nearly bowled over Duffham. The doctor, coming home from a distant patient, to whom he had been called in the night, was jogging along on his useful old horse.

"Well!" said he to the banker. "You *are* off early!"

"Drive on, don't stop," whispered Clement-Pell to the groom. "I got news last night of the dangerous illness of my poor old uncle, and am going to see him," he called out to Duffham as they passed. "We shall have it piping hot again to-day, doctor!"

The groom told of this encounter afterwards —as did Duffham too, for that matter. And neither of them had any more suspicion that Clement-Pell was playing a part, than a baby could have had. In the course of the morning the groom drove in again, having safely conveyed his master to a distant station. The family went to church as usual, chaperoned by Miss Phebus. Mrs. Clement-Pell stayed at home, saying she had a head-ache: and no doubt quietly completed her preparations.

About six o'clock at night a telegram was delivered. The uncle was dying: Mrs. Clement-Pell must come as soon as possible, to be in time to see him: as to bringing the children she must do as she pleased about that. In Mrs. Pell's agitation and dismay she read the telegram aloud to the governess and the servant who brought it to her. Then was confusion! Mrs. Pell seemed to have lost her head. Take the children?—Of course she should take them;—and, oh, when was the earliest time they could start?

The earliest time by rail was the following morning. And part of the night was again passed in preparation—open, this time. Mrs. Clement-Pell said they should probably stay away some days, perhaps a week or two, and must take things accordingly. The boxes were all brought into her room, that she might superintend ; the poor old uncle was so very particular as to dress, she said, and she trusted he might get well yet. On the Monday morning, she and her daughters departed in the large carriage, at the same early hour that her husband had gone, and for the same remote station. After all, not so much luggage went ; only a box apiece. In stepping into her carriage, she told the servants that it would be an excellent opportunity to clean the paint of the sitting-rooms and of the first floor while she was away : the previous week she had remarked to them that it wanted doing.

The day went on ; the household, no doubt, enjoying their freedom, and letting the paint alone. No suspicion was aroused amid them until late in the afternoon, when a curious rumour was brought over of some confusion at the chief bank—that it had stopped, and its master flown. At first the governess and servants laughed at this : but the confirmation soon came thick and three-fold. Clement-Pell had burst up.

And why the expression “bursting-up”

should have been universally applied to the calamity by all people, high and low, I know no more than you ; but it was so. Perhaps in men's minds there existed some assimilation between a bubble, that shines brightly for its brief existence before bursting, like the worthless froth it is, and the brilliant but foundationless career of Mr. Clement-Pell.

The calamity at first was too great to be believed in. It drove people mad only to fancy it might be true : and one or two, alas ! subsequently went mad in reality. For the bursting-up of Mr. Clement-Pell's huge undertakings caused the bursting-up of many private ones, and of households with them. Means of living went ; homes were made desolate.

It would be easier to tell you of those who had not trusted money in the hands of Clement-Pell, than of those who had. Some had given him their all. Led away by the fascinating prospect of a large interest, they forgot future security in the dazzling but most delusive light of present good. I should like it to be distinctly understood that I, Johnny Ludlow, am writing of a matter which took place years ago ; and not of any more recent event, or events, that may have since occurred to shake the public equanimity in our own local world.

The disbelief in the misfortune was natural. Clement-Pell had stood on a lofty pedestal,

unapproachable by common individuals. We put greater trust in him—in his unbounded wealth, his honest good faith, his perfect stability—than we could have put in any other man on the face of the globe. I think he was more to some of us than Prince Albert: I know that we should nearly as soon have expected the skies to fall as Clement-Pell. The interests of so many were involved and the ruin would be so universal, that the frightened natives could only take refuge in disbelief: and Squire Todhetley amidst them.

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The news was brought to Dyke Manor on the Tuesday morning, as you have heard, by the butcher's boy, Sam Rimmer; and was confirmed by Mr. Brandon. When the first momentary shock had been digested by the Squire, he arrived at the conclusion that it must be false. But that Sam had trotted off on his saddleless horse, he might have heard the length of the Pater's tongue. Sam being gone, he turned his indignation on Mr. Brandon.

"One would have thought you had sense to know better, Brandon," said he, raging about the breakfast-room with the skirts of his light morning coat held out behind. "Giving ear to a cock-and-bull story that *can't* be true! Take care Pell does not get to hear it. He'd sue you for defamation."

"He'd be welcome," nodded old Brandon, his thin voice thinner than ever, as he stood, whip in hand, against the window.

"The grand fête of last Thursday," gasped Mrs. Todhetley—who had been puzzling her brains over Sam Rimmer's master's book, the writing in which could never be deciphered. "Surely the Clement-Pells would not have given that fête had things been going amiss with them."

"And poured their iced champagne, unlimited, down folk's throats ; and strutted about in their point-lace and diamonds," added old Brandon. "Madam, I'd believe it all the more for that."

As he spoke, the remembrance of the scene I had witnessed in the grounds, and Clement-Pell's curious fear later when I told him of the same man watching him, flashed over me, bringing a conviction that the report was true.

"I heard it at the chief bank yesterday," began Mr. Brandon. "Having some business to transact in the town, I went over by train in the afternoon, and chanced to meet Wilcox in High Street. He is a red-faced man in general——"

"Oh, I know Wilcox," impatiently interrupted the Squire. "Face as red as the sun in a mist. What has that to do with it ?"

"Well, it was as pale yesterday as the moon on a frosty night," went on old Brandon. "I asked if he had an attack of bile—being subject

to it myself—and he said No, it was an attack of fear. And then he told me that there was a report in town that something was wrong with Pell's affairs, and that he had run away. Wilcox will lose every penny of his savings."

"All talk; all talk," said the Pater in his obstinacy.

"And for a man to come to Wilcox's age, which must be five-and-fifty, it is no light blow to lose a life's savings," calmly went on old Brandon. "I went to the bank, and found it besieged by an excited and angry crowd fighting to get in, the door locked, and the porter vainly trying to put the shutters up. That was enough to show me what the matter was, and I left Wilcox to it."

The Squire stared in perplexity, rubbing up his scanty hair the wrong way while his senses came to him.

"It is all true," said Mr. Brandon, nodding to him. "Church Dykely is in an uproar this morning already."

"I'll go and see for myself," said the Squire, stripping off his nankeen coat in haste so great that he tore one sleeve nearly out. "I'll go and see; this is *not* believable. Clement-Pell would never have swindled me out of two hundred pounds only a day or two before he knew he was going all to smash."

"The most likely time for him to do it," persisted Mr. Brandon. "People, as a rule,

only do these things when they are desperate."

But the Squire did not stay to listen. Setting himself into his other coat, he went driving on across the fields as though he were walking for a wager. Mr. Brandon mounted his cob, and put up his umbrella against the sun.

"Never embark any money with these beguiling people that promise you undue interest, Johnny Ludlow," said Mr. Brandon to me, as I kept by his side, and opened the gates for him. "Where would you have been now, young man—or, worse, where should I have been—had I, the trustee of your property, consented to risk it with Pell? He asked me to do it."

"Clement-Pell did, sir? When?"

"A year or two ago. I gave him an answer, Johnny: and I fancy he has not altogether liked me since. 'I could not think of placing even a shilling of Johnny Ludlow's where I did not know it to be safe,' I said to him. 'It will be safe with me,' says Pell, sharply. 'Possibly so, Mr. Pell,' I answered; 'but you see there's only your word to guarantee it, and that is not enough for an honest trustee.' That shut him up."

"Do you mean to say you have doubted Clement-Pell's stability, Brandon?" demanded the Squire, who was near enough to hear this.

"I don't know about doubting," was the

answer. “I have thought it as likely to come to a smash as not. That the chances for it were rather better than half.”

This sent the Squire on again with a run. He had no umbrella ; and his straw hat glistened with a white heat.

Church Dykely was in a commotion. Folks were rushing up to the little branch bank black in the face, as if their collars throttled them ; for the news was spreading like dry turf that has caught fire. The Squire went bolting in through every obstruction, and seized upon the manager.

“Do you mean to tell me that it’s true, Robertson ?” he fiercely cried.—“That things have gone to smash ?”

“I am afraid it is, sir,” said Robertson, who was looking more dead than alive. “I am unable to understand it. It has fallen upon me with as much surprise as it has on others.”

“Now, don’t you go and tell falsehoods, Robertson,” roared the Squire, as if he meant to shake the man. “Surprise upon you, indeed ! Why, have you not been here—at the head and tail of everything ?”

“But I did not know how affairs were going. Indeed, sir, I tell you truth.”

“Tell a jackass not to bray !” foamed the Squire. “Have you been short of funds here lately, or have you not ? Come, answer me that.”

"It is true. We have been short. But Mr. Clement-Pell excused it to me by saying that the temporary lock-up of his money ran the banks short, especially the small branch banks. I declare, before Heaven, that I implicitly believed him," added Robertson, "that I never suspected there could be any graver cause."

"Then you are either a fool or a knave."

"Not a knave, Squire Todhetley. A fool I suppose I have been."

"I want my two hundred pounds," returned the Squire. "Come, Robertson, I mean to have it."

But Robertson had known nothing of the loan; was surprised to hear of it now. As to repayment, that was out of his power. He had not two hundred pence left in the place, let alone pounds.

"It is a case of swindle," said the Squire.  
"It's not one of common debt."

"I can't help it," returned Robertson. "If it were to save Mr. Clement-Pell from hanging, I could not give a stiver of it. There's my own salary, sir, since midsummer; that, I suppose, I shall lose: and I can't afford it, and I don't know what will become of me and my poor little children."

At this, the Squire's voice and anger dropped, and he shook hands with Robertson. But, as a rule, everybody began by browbeating the manager. The noise was deafening.

How had Pell got off? By which route : road, or rail? By day or night? It was a regular hubbub of questions. Mr. Brandon sat on his cob all the while, patiently blinking his eyes at the people.

Palmerby of Rock Cottage came up; his old hands trembling, his face as white as the new paint on Duffham's windows. "It can't be true!" he was crying. "It can't be true!"

"Had you money in his hands, Palmerby?"

"Every shilling I possess in the world."

Mr. Brandon opened his lips to blow him up for foolishness: but something in the poor old face stopped him. Palmerby elbowed his way into the bank. Duffham came out of his house, a gallipot of ointment in his hand.

"Well, this is a pretty go!"

The Squire took hold of him by the button-hole. "Where's the villainous swindler off to, Duffham?"

"I should like to know," answered the surgeon. "I'd be pretty soon on his trail and ask him to refund my money."

"But surely he has none of yours?"

"Pretty nigh half the savings of my years."

"Mercy be good to us!" cried the Pater. "He got two hundred pounds out of me last week. What's to become of us all?"

"It's not so much a question of what is to become of us—of you and me, Squire," said Duffham, philosophically, "as of those who

had invested with him their all. We can bear the loss : you can afford it without much hurt ; I must work a few years longer, Heaven permitting me, than I had thought to work. That's the worst of us. But what will those others do ? What will be the worst for them ? ”

Mr. Brandon nodded approvingly from his saddle.

“ Coming home last night from Duck Lane —by the way, there's another infant at John Mitchel's, because he had not enough before—the blacksmith accosted me, saying Clement-Pell was reported to be in a mess and to have run off. The thing sounded so preposterous that I thought at first Dobbs must have been drinking ; and told him that I happened to know Clement-Pell was only off to a relative's death-bed. For on Sunday morning, you see——”

A crush and rush stopped Duffham's narrative, and nearly knocked the lot of us down. Ball the milkman had come bumping among us in a frantic state, his milk-cans swinging from his shoulders against my legs.

“ I say, Ball, take care of my trousers. Milk stains, you know.”

“ Master Ludlow, sir, I be a'most mad, I think. Folks is saying as Mr. Clement-Pell and his banks have busted up.”

“ Well ? You have not lost anything, I suppose ? ”

“ Not lost ! ” panted poor Ball. “ I've lost all

I've got. 'Twere a hundred pound, Mr. Johnny, scraped together hard enou', as goodness knows. Mr. Clement-Pell were a-talking to me one day, and he says, says he, Ah, says he, it's difficult to get much interest now ; money's plentiful. I give eight per cent., says he ; most persons gets but three. Would ye take mine, sir, says I ; my hundred pound ? If you like, he says. And I took it to him, gentlemen, thinking what luck I was in, and how safe it were. My hundred pound !"—letting the wooden balance slip off his smock-frock, so that the cans went down with a clatter, and the milk was quite a pool. "My hundred pound that I'd toiled so hard for ! Gentlefolk, wherever be all the money a-gone?"

Well, it was a painful scene. One we were glad to get out of. The Squire, outrageously angry at the way he had been done out of his money, insisted on going to Parrifer Hall. Mr. Brandon rode his cob ; Duffham stepped into his surgery to leave the gallipot and get his hat.

One might have fancied a sale was going on. The doors were open : boxes belonging to some of the servants were lying by the side entrance, ready to be carted away ; people (creditors and curiosity-mongers) stood about. Sam Rimmer's master, the butcher, came out of the house as we went in, swearing. Perkins had not been paid for a twelvemonth, and said it would be his ruin. Miss Phebus was in the

hall, and seemed to have been having it out with him. She was a light-haired, bony lady of thirty-five, or so, and had made a rare good gipsy that day in the tent. Her eyes were peculiar: green in some lights, yellow in others: a frightfully hard look they had in them this morning.

"Oh, Mr. Todhetley, I am so glad to see you!" she said. "It is a cruel turn that the Clement-Pells have served me! leaving me here without warning, to bear the brunt of all this! Have you come in the interests of friendship to the family?"

"I've come after my own interests, ma'am," returned the Pater. "To find out, if I can, where Clement-Pell has gone: and to see if I can get back any of the money I have been done out of."

"Why, it seems everybody must be a creditor!" she exclaimed in surprise, on hearing this.

"I know I am one," was his answer.

"To serve *me* such a trick,—to behave to me with this duplicity: it is infamous," went on Miss Phebus, after she had related to us the chief events of the Sunday, as connected with the story of the dying uncle and the telegram. "If I get the chance, I will have the law against them, Mr. Todhetley."

"It is what a few more of us mean to do, ma'am," he answered.

"They owe me forty pounds. Yes, Mr. Duffham, it is forty pounds: and I cannot afford to lose it. Mrs. Pell has put me off from time to time: and I supposed it to be all right; I suspected nothing. They have not treated me well lately, either. Leaving me here to take care of the house while they were enjoying themselves up in Kensington! I had a great mind to give warning then. The German governess got offended while they were in town, and left. Some friend of Fabian Pell's was rude to her."

A little man looked into the room just then; noting down the furniture with his eye. "None of these here articles must be moved, you understand, mum," he said to Miss Phebus.

"Don't talk to me," she answered wrathfully. "I am going out of the house as soon as I can put my things together." And the man went away.

"If I had but suspected!" she resumed to us, her angry tone full of pain; "and I think I might, had I exercised my wits. My room is next to Mrs. Pell's; but it's not much larger than a closet, and has no fireplace in it: she only gave it me because it was not good enough for anybody else. Saturday night was very hot—as you must remember—and I could not sleep. The window was open, but the room felt like an oven. After tossing about for I don't know how long I got up and opened the

door, thinking it might bring in a breath of air. At that moment I heard sounds below—the quiet shutting of a door, and the advance of footsteps. Wondering who could be up so late, I peeped out and saw Mrs. Pell. She came up softly, a candle in her hand, and her face quite curious and altered—aged, and pale, and haggard. She must be afraid of the ghosts, I thought to myself, as she turned off into her chamber—for we had been telling ghost-stories that night up to bed-time. After that, I did not get to sleep; not, as it seemed, for hours; and all the while I heard drawers being opened and shut in her bed and dressing room. She must even then have been preparing for the flight."

"And the dying uncle was invented for the occasion, I presume," remarked Mr. Duffham.

"All I know is, I never heard of an uncle before," she tartly answered. "I asked Mrs. Clement-Pell on Sunday night where the uncle lived, and how long a journey they had to go: she answered shortly that he was at his country house, and bade me not tease her. Mr. Duffham, can my own boxes be stopped?"

"I should think nobody would attempt to do it," he answered. "But I'd get them out as soon as I could, were I you, Miss Phebus."

"What a wreck it will be!" she exclaimed.

"You have said the right word, ma'am," put in Mr. Brandon, who had left his horse

outside. "And not only here. Wrecks they will be; and many of them."

We stood looking at one another ruefully. The Pater had come to hunt up his two hundred pounds; but there did not seem to exist much chance of his doing it. "Look here," said he suddenly to the governess, "where was that telegram sent from?"

"We have not been able to discover. It was only seen by Mrs. Pell. After she had read it aloud, she crushed it up in her hand, as if in frightful distress, and called out about the poor dear old uncle. She took care it should not be seen: we may be very sure of that."

"But who sent the telegram?"

"I don't know," said Miss Phebus viciously. "Her husband, no doubt. Neither was the luggage that they took with them labelled: we have remembered the fact since."

"I think we might track them by that luggage," observed the Pater. "Five big boxes."

"If you do track them by it I'll eat the luggage wholesale," cried wise old Brandon. "Clement-Pell's not a fool, or his wife either. They'll go off in just the opposite direction that they appeared to go—and their boxes in another. As to Pell, he was probably unknown at the distant station the groom drove him to."

There was no end to serve by staying longer at the house, and we quitted it, leaving poor Miss Phebus to her temper. I had never much

liked her ; but I could not help feeling for her that unlucky morning.

" What's to be done now ? " gloomily cried the Squire while old Brandon was mounting. " It's like being in a wood, that you can't get out of, this is. If Clement-Pell had played an honest part with me : if he had come and said, ' Mr. Todhetley, I am in sore need of a little help,' and told me a bit about things : I don't say that I would have refused him the money. But to dupe me out of it in the specious way he did was nothing short of swindling ; and I will bring him to book for it if I can."

That day was only the beginning of sorrow. There have been such cases since : perhaps worse ; where a kind of wholesale ruin has fallen upon a neighbourhood : but none, to me, have equalled that. It was the first calamity of the kind in my experience : and in all things, whether of joy or sorrow, our earliest impressions are the most vivid. It is the first step that costs, the French tell us : and that is true of all things.

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The ruin turned out to be wider even than was feared ; the distress greater. Some had only lost part of their superfluous cash. It was mortifying ; but it did not affect their prosperity further, or take from them the means of daily

livelihood: no luxuries need be given up, or any servants dispensed with. Others had invested so much that it would throw them back years, perhaps cripple them for life. Pitiable enough, that, but not the worst. It was as nothing to those who had lost their all.

People made it their business to find out more of Mr. and Mrs. Clement-Pell than had been known before. Both were of quite obscure origin, it turned out, and he had *not* been a lawyer in London, but only a lawyer's clerk. So much the more credit to him for getting on to be something better. If he had but had the sense to let well alone ! But she ?—well, all I mean to say here, is this: that the farmers she had turned up her nose at were far, far better born and bred, even the smallest of them, than she was. Let that go: other women have been just as foolishly upstart as Mrs. Clement-Pell. One fact came out that I think *riled* the public worse than any: that his christian name was Clement and his surname Pell. He had united the two when growing into a great man, and put a "J." before the Clement, which had no right there. Mr. Brandon had known it all along—at least he chanced to know that in early life his name was simply Clement Pell. The Squire, when he heard of this, went into a rage of reproach at old Brandon, because he had not told it.

"Nay, why should I have sought to do the man an injury ?" remonstrated Mr. Brandon.

"It was no business of mine, that I should interfere. We must live and let live, Squire, if we care to go through the world peaceably."

The days went on, swelling the list of creditors who came forward to declare themselves such. The wonder was, that so many had been taken in. But you see, people had not made it their business to proclaim that their money lay with Clement-Pell. Gentlefolks who lived on their fortunes ; professional men of all classes, including the clergy ; commercial men of a high and low degree ; small tradespeople ; widows with a slender income, and spinsters with less. If Clement-Pell had taken the money of these people, not intentionally to swindle them, as the Squire put it in regard to his own, but only knowing there was a risk that it would not be safe, he must have been a hard and cruel man. I think the cries of the defrauded of that unhappy time must have gone direct to heaven.

He was not spared. Could hard words injure an absentee, Clement-Pell must have come in for all kinds of harm. His ears burned, I should fancy—if there's any truth in the saying that ears turn hot when distant friends give pepper. The queerest fact was, that no money seemed to be left. Of all the millions that Clement-Pell had been worth, or had had to play with, none remained. It was inconceivable. What had become of the stores ? The hoards of gold ;

the chests, popularly supposed to be stuffed full ; the bank-notes ; all the floating capital—where was it all ? Nobody could tell. People gazed at each other with dismayed faces as they asked it. Bit by bit, the awful embarrassment, in which he had been plunged for years, came to light. The fictitious capital he had created had eaten up itself : and the good money of the public had been eaten with it. Of course he had made himself secure and carried off loads, said the maddened creditors. But they might have been mistaken there.

For a week or two confusion reigned. Accountants set to work in a fog; official assignees strove to come to the bottom of the muddy waters. There existed some of what people called securities ; but they were so hemmed in by claims and debts that the only result looming out was—that there would not be anything for anybody. Clement-Pell had done well to escape, or the unhappy victims had certainly tarred and feathered him. All that while he was being searched for, and not a clue could be obtained. Stranger perhaps to say, there was no clue to his wife and daughters. The five boxes had disappeared. It was ascertained that certain boxes, answering to the description of these, had been sent to London on the Monday from a populous station by quick train, and were claimed at the London terminus by a gentleman who did *not* bear any resemblance to Clement-Pell. I'm

sure the excitement of the affair was something before unknown to the Squire, raging up hill and down dale in the August weather, and must have been as good to him as a course of Turkish baths.

Ah me ! it is all very well to write of it in a light strain at this distance of time ; but God alone knows how many hearts were broken by it.

One of the worst cases was poor Jacob Palmerby's. He had saved money that brought him in about a hundred a year in his old age. Clement-Pell got hold of the money, doubled the interest, and Palmerby thought that a golden era had set in. For several years now he had enjoyed it. His wife was dead ; his only son, who had been a sizar at Cambridge, was a curate in London. With the bursting up of Clement-Pell, Jacob Palmerby's means burst up : he had literally not a sixpence left in the world. The blow seemed to have struck him stupid. He mostly sat in silence, his head hanging on his breast ; his clothes uncared for.

“Come, Palmerby, you must cheer up, you know,” said the Squire to him one evening that we looked in at Rock Cottage, and found Mr. Brandon there.

“Me cheer up,” he returned, lifting his face for a moment—and in the last fortnight it had grown ten years older. “What am I to cheer up for ? There’s nothing left. I can go into the workhouse—but there’s poor Michael.”

" Michael ? "

" My son, the parson. The capital that ought to have been his after me, and brought him in his hundred a year, as it did me before I drew it from the funds, is gone. Gone. It is of him I think. He has been a good son always. I hope he won't take to curse me."

" Parsons don't curse, you know, and Michael will be a good son still," said Mr. Brandon, shrilly. " Don't you fret, Palmerby. Fretting does no good."

" It 'ud wear out a donkey—as I tell him," put in the old woman servant, Nanny, who had brought in his supper of bread-and-milk.

He did not lift his head ; just swayed it once from side to side by way of general response.

" It's the way he goes on all day, masters," whispered Nanny when we went out. " His heart's a-breaking—and I wish it was that knave of a Pell's instead. All these purty flowers to be left," pointing to the clusters of roses and geraniums and honeysuckles within the gate, " and the chairs and tables to be sold, and the very beds to be took from under us ! "

" Nay, nay, Nanny, it may turn out better than that," spoke the Squire.

" Why, how can it turn out better, sirs ? " she asked. " Pell didn't pay the dividends this two times past : and the master, believing

as all his boasting excuses was gospel, never thought of pressing for it. If we be in debt to the landlord and others, is it our fault? But the sticks and stones must be sold to pay, and the place be given up. There be the work'us for me; I know that, and it don't much matter; but it'll be a crying shame if the poor master have to move into it."

So it would be. And there were others in a similar plight to his; nothing else but the workhouse before them.

"He won't never live to go—that's one consolation," was Nanny's last comment as she held the gate open. "Good evening to ye, sirs; good evening, Master Johnny."

What with talking to Dobbs the blacksmith, and staying with Duffham to drink what he called a dish of tea, it was nearly dark when I set out home; the Squire and Mr. Brandon having gone off without me. I was vaulting over the stile to take the near way across the fields, expecting to catch it for staying, when a man shot into my path from behind the hedge.

"Johnny Ludlow."

Well, I did feel surprised. It was Gusty Pell!

"Halloo!" said I. I thought you were in Scotland."

"I was there," he answered. And then, while we looked at one another, he began to tell me the reason of his coming away. Why it is

that all kinds of people seem to put confidence in me and trust me with matters they'd never speak of to others, I have never found out. Had it been Tod, for instance, Gusty Pell would never have shown himself out of the hedge to talk to him.

Gusty, shooting the grouse on the moors, had found his purse emptied of its last coin. He wrote to his father for more money ; wrote and wrote ; but none arrived : neither money nor letter. Being particularly in want of supplies, he borrowed a sovereign or two from his friends, and came off direct to see the reason why. Arrived within a few miles of home he heard very ugly rumours ; stories that startled him. So he waited and came on by night, thinking it more prudent not to show himself.

"Tell me all about it, Johnny Ludlow, for the love of goodness !" he cried, his low voice a little hoarse with agitation, and his hand grasping my arm like a vice. "I have been taking a look at the place outside"—pointing up the road towards Parrifer Hall—"but it seems to be empty."

It was empty, save for a man who had charge of the things until the sale could take place. Softening the narrative a little, and not calling everything by the name the public called it, I told the facts to Gusty.

He drew a deep breath at the end, like fifteen sighs put into one. Then I asked him

how it was he had not heard these things—not been written to.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I have been moving about in Scotland : perhaps a letter of their’s may have miscarried ; and I suppose my later letters did not reach them. The last letter I got was from Constance, giving me an account of some grand fête here that had taken place the previous day.”

“Yes. I was at it with Todhetley and the Whitneys. The—the crisis came three or four days after that.”

“Johnny, where’s my father ?” he asked, after a pause, his voice sunk to a lower whisper.

“It is not known where he is.”

“Is it true that he is being—being looked for ?”

“I am afraid it is.”

“And, if they find him—what then ? Why don’t you speak ?” he impatiently added.

“I don’t know what. Some people say it will only be a bad case of bankruptcy.”

“Any way, it is a complete smash.”

“Yes, it’s that.”

“Will it, do you think, be final ruin, Johnny ? Ruin utter and unmitigated ?”

“It is that already—to many persons round about.”

“But I mean to my own people,” said he, impatiently.

“Well, I should fear it would be.”

Gusty took off his hat to wipe his brow. It looked damp and white in the starlight.

"What will become of me? I must fly too," he muttered, as if to the stars in the sky. "And what of Fabian?—he cannot remain in his regiment. Johnny Ludlow, this blow is like death."

And it struck me that of the two calamities, Gusty Pell, non-religious though he was, would rather have met death. I felt dreadfully sorry for him.

"Where's James?" he suddenly asked.  
"Is he gone too?"

"James disappeared on the Sunday, it is said. It would hardly have been safe for him to stay: the popular feeling is very bitter."

"Well, I must make myself scarce again also," he said, after a pause. "Could you lend me a pound or so, Johnny, if you've got it about you?"

I told him I wished I had; he should have been heartily welcome to it. Pulling out my pockets, I counted it all up—two shillings and fivepence. Gusty turned from it with disdain.

"Well, good evening, Johnny. Thank you for your good wishes—and for telling me what you have. I don't know to whom else I could have applied: and I am glad to have chanced to meet you."

He gave a deep sigh, shook my hand, got over the stile, and crept away, keeping close to

the hedge, as if he intended to make for Alcester. I stood and watched him until he was hidden in the shadows.

And so the Pells, one and all, went out to exile in some unknown region, and the poor duped people stayed to face their ruin at home. It was an awful time, and that's the truth.

## XXV.

## OVER THE WATER.

WE had what they called the “dead-lights” put in the ladies’ cabin at Gravesend : that will show what the weather was expected to be in the open sea. In our place, the saloon, things were pitching about before we reached Margate. Rounding the point off Broadstairs, the steamer caught it hot and sharp.

“Never heed a bit of pitching : we’ve got the wind all for us, and shall make a short passage,” said the captain in a hearty tone, by way of consolation to the passengers generally. “A bit o’ breeze at sea is pleasant.”

Pleasant it might be to him, Captain Tune, tucking in a good dinner, as much at ease as if he had been sitting in his dining-room ashore. Not so pleasant, though, for some of us, his passengers.

Ramsgate passed, with other landmarks, and away in the open sea, it was just like a gale. That, and nothing less. Somebody said so to the man at the wheel : a tall,

middle-aged, bronzed-faced fellow in shirt sleeves and open blue waistcoat.

"Bless y're ignorance! This a gale! Why, 'taint half a one. It'll be a downright fair passage, this 'un will, shorter nor ord'nary."

"What do you call a gale—if this is not one?"

"I ain't allowed to talk: you may see it writ up."

"Writ up," it was. "Passengers are requested not to talk to the man at the wheel." But if he had been allowed to talk, and talked till now, he'd never have convinced some of the unhappy creatures around, that the state of wind then blowing was not a gale.

It whistled in the sails, it roared over the paddle-wheels, it seemed to play at pitch-and-toss with the sea. The waves heaved up with mountain force, and then broke down like mad: the steamer rolled, and lurched, and righted herself; and then lurched and rolled again. Captain Tune stood aloft with equanimity, apparently enjoying it, the gold band on his cap glistening in the sun. We got his name from the boat bills; and a jolly, courteous, attentive captain he seemed to be. But for the pitching and tossing and general discomfort, it would have been called beautiful weather. The air was bright; the sun as hot as it is in July, although September was all but out, and October in.

"Johnny. Johnny Ludlow."

The voice—Mr. Brandon's—was too faint to be squeaky. He sat mid-ships on a camp stool, his back against the cabin wall—or whatever the boarding was—wrapped in a plaid. A yellow handkerchief was tied cornerwise over his head, partly to keep his cap from flying off, partly as a protection to his ears. The handkerchief hid most of his face, except his little nose; which was looking pinched and nearly as yellow as the silk.

"Did you call me, sir?"

"I wish you'd see if you can get to my back tail pocket, Johnny. I've been trying for this ten minutes, and do nothing but find my hands hopelessly entangled in the plaid. There's a tin box of lozenges there."

"Do you feel ill, sir?" I asked, as I found the box, and gave it to him.

"Never was ill at sea in my life, Johnny, in the way you mean. But the motion always gives me the most frightful headache imaginable. How are you?"

The less said about how I was, the better. All I hoped was he'd not keep me talking.

"Where's the Squire?" he asked.

I pointed to a distant heap on the deck, from which groans came out occasionally: and just managed to speak in answer.

"He seems uncommonly ill, sir."

"Well, he *would* come, you know, Johnny. Tell him he ought to take——"

What he ought to take was lost in the rush of a wave which came dashing over us.

After all, I suppose it was a quick and good, though rough passage, for Boulogne-sur-Mer was sighted before we thought for. As the more still I kept the better I was, there was nothing to do but to sit motionless and stare at it.

You'll never guess what was taking us across the Channel. Old Brandon called it from the first a wild-goose chase ; but, go, the Squire would. He was after that gentleman who had played havoc with many people's hearts and money, who had, so to say, scattered ruin wholesale—Mr. Clement Pell.

Not a trace had the public been able to obtain as to the direction of the Pells' flight ; not a clue to the spot in which they might be hiding themselves. The weeks had gone on since their departure : August passed into September, September was passing : and for all that could be discovered of them, they might as well never have existed. The committee for winding up the miserable affairs raged and fumed and pitied, and wished they could just put their hands on the man who had wrought the evil ; Squire Todhetley raged and fumed also on his private score ; but none of them were the nearer finding Pell. In my whole life I had never seen the Squire so much put out. It was not altogether the loss of the two

hundred pounds he had been (as he persisted in calling it) swindled out of; it was the distress he had to daily witness around him. I do think nothing would have given him more satisfaction than to join a mob in administering lynch law to Clement Pell, and to tar and feather him first. Before this happened, the Squire had talked of going to the seaside: but he would not listen to a word on the subject now: only to speak of it put him out of temper. Tod was away. He received an invitation to stay with some people in Gloucestershire, who had good game preserves; and was off the next day. And things were in this lively state at home: the Squire grumbling, Mrs. Todhetley driving about with one or other of the children in the mild donkey-cart, and I fit to eat my head off with having nothing to do: when some news arrived of the probable sojourn-place of the Clement-Pells.

The news was not much. And perhaps hardly to be called reliable. Mr. and Mrs. Sterling at the Court had been over to Paris for a fortnight: taking the baby with them. I must say, that Mrs. Sterling was always having babies—if anybody cares for the information. Before one could walk, another was sure to arrive. And not only the baby but the baby's nursemaid, Charlotte. Old Brandon, remarking upon it, said he'd rather travel with half a score mischievous growing boys than

one baby: and *they* were about the worst calamity he could think of.

Well, in coming home, the Sterling party had, to make the short crossing, put themselves on board the Folkestone boat at Boulogne, and the nursemaid was sitting on deck with the baby on her lap, when, just as the steamer was moving away, she saw, or thought she saw, Constance Pell, standing on the shore a little apart from the people gathered there to watch the boat off. Mrs. Sterling told the nurse she must be mistaken; but Charlotte held to it that she was not. As chance had it, Squire Todhetley was at the Court with old Sterling when they got home; and he heard this. It put him into a commotion. He questioned Charlotte closely, but she never wavered in her statement.

"I am positive it was Miss Constance Pell, sir," she repeated. "She had on a thick blue veil and one of them new-fashioned large round capes. Just as I happened to be looking at her—not thinking it was anybody I knew—a gust of wind took the veil right up above her bonnet, and I saw it was Miss Constance Pell. She pulled at the veil with both her hands, in a scuffle like, to get it before her face again."

"Then I'll go off to Boulogne," said the Squire with stern resolution. And back he came to Dyke Manor full of it.

"It will be a wild-goose chase," observed

Mr. Brandon, who had called in. "If Pell has removed himself no further away than Boulogne—that is, allowing he has got out of England at all—he is a greater fool than I took him for."

"Wild-goose chase or not, I shall go," said the Pater hotly. "And I shall take Johnny: he'll be useful as an interpreter."

"I will go with you," came the unexpected rejoinder of Mr. Brandon. "I want a bit of a change."

And so, we went up to London to take the steamer there. And here we were in it, all three of us, ploughing the waves en route for Boulogne, on the wild-goose chase after Clement Pell.

Just as the passengers had come to the conclusion that they must die of it, the steamer shot into Boulogne Harbour. She was tolerably long swinging round; then was made fast, and we began to land. Mr. Brandon took off his yellow turban and shook his cap out.

"Johnny, I'd never have come if I had known it was going to be like this," moaned the poor Squire—and every trace of red had gone out of his face. "No, not even to catch Clement Pell. What on earth is that crowd for?"

It looked to be about five hundred people; they were pushing and crushing each other in a fight for places to see us land and go through

the custom-house. No need to tell of this: not a reader of you but must know it well.

The first thing, clear to my senses amid the general confusion, was the hearing my name shouted out by the Squire in the custom-house.

“Johnny Ludlow!”

He was standing before two Frenchmen in queer hats, who sat behind a table or counter, asking him questions and preparing to write down the answers: what his name was, and how many years he had, and where he was born, just as though he were a footman in want of a place. Not a word could he understand, and looked round for me helplessly. As to my French—well, I knew it pretty well, and talked often with our French master at Dr. Frost’s: but you must not think I was as fluent in it as though I’d been a born Frenchman. It was rather the other way.

We put up at the Hôtel des Bains. A good hotel—as is well known—but nothing to look at from the street. Mr. Brandon had been in Boulogne before, and always used it. The table d’hôte restored the Squire’s colour and spirits together: and by the time dinner was over, he felt ready to encounter the sea again. As to Mr. Brandon, he made his meal of some watery broth, two slices of melon, and a bowlful of pounded sugar.

The great question was—to discover whether

the Clement-Pells were in the town ; and, if so, to find them out. Mr. Brandon's opinion never varied—that Charlotte had been mistaken and they were not in the place at all. Allowing, for argument's sake, that they were there, he said, they would no doubt be living partly in concealment ; and it might not answer for us to go inquiring about them openly, lest they got to hear of it, and took measures to secure themselves. There was sense in that.

The next day we went strolling up to the postal bureau in Old Men's Street—Rue des Vieillards—the wind blowing us round the corners sharply ; and there inquired for the address of the Clement-Pells. The people were not over-civil ; stared as if they'd never been asked for an address before ; and shortly affirmed that no such a name was known *there*.

"Why, of course not," said old Brandon quietly, as we strolled down again. "They'd not be in the town under their own name—if they are here at all."

And there would lie the difficulty.

That wind, that man at the wheel had scoffed at when called a gale, had been at any rate the beginning of one. It grew higher and higher, chopping round to the south-west, and for three days we had it kindly. On the second day not a boat could get out or in ; and there were no bathing machines. The sea was like a great surging plain, full of angry tumult—but

it was a grand sight to see. The waves dashed over the pier, ducking the three or four venturesome spirits who went on there. I was one—and received a good blowing up from Mr. Brandon for my pains.

The gale passed. The weather set in again calm and lovely; but we seemed to be no nearer hearing anything of the Clement-Pells. So far as that went, the time was being wasted: but I don't think any of us cared much about that. We kept our eyes open, looking out for them, and asked questions in a quiet way: at the *établissement*, where the dancing went on; at the libraries; and of the pew women at the churches. No; no success: and time went on to the second week in October. On account of the remarkably fine warm weather, the season and amusements were protracted.

One Friday morning I was sitting on the pier in the sunshine, listening to a couple of musicians, who appeared there every day. He had a violin; she played a guitar and sang “*Figaro*.” An old gentleman by me said he had heard her sing the same song for nearly a score of years past. The town kept very full—for the weather was more like summer than autumn. There were moments, and this was one, that I wished more than ever Tod was over.

Strolling back off the pier and along the port, picking my way amid the cords of the fishing-boats, stretched across the path, I met

face to face—Constance Pell. The thick blue veil, just as Charlotte had described it, was drawn over her bonnet: but something in her shape struck me, and I saw her features through the veil. She saw me too, and turned her head sharply away over the harbour.

I went on without notice, making believe not to have seen her. Glancing round presently, I saw her cross the road and begin to come back on the other side by the houses. Knowing that the only chance was to trace her to her home, and not to let her see I was doing it, I stopped before one of the boats, and began talking to a fisherman, never turning my head towards her at all. She passed quickly, on to the long street, once glancing back at me. When she was fairly on her way, I went tearing at the top of my speed to the front of the hotel, the port entrance; ran straight through the yard, and up to my room, which faced the street. There she was, walking onwards always, and very quickly. Close by the chemist's shop at the opposite corner, she turned to look behind; no doubt looking after me, and no doubt gratified that I was nowhere to be seen. Then she went on again.

Neither the Squire nor Mr. Brandon was in the hotel, that I could find; so I had to take the matter on myself, and do the best I could. Letting her get well ahead, I followed her cautiously. She turned up the Grande Rue, and I

turned also, keeping her in view. The streets were tolerably full, and though she looked behind several times, I am sure she did not see me.

Up the hill of the Grande Rue, past the Vice-Consulate, under the gateway of the Upper Town, through the Upper Town itself, and out at another gateway. I thought she was never going to stop. Away further yet, to the neighbourhood of a little place called Mâquétra—but I am not sure that I spell the word rightly. There she turned into a small house that had a garden before it.

They call me a muff at home, as you have heard often : and there's no doubt I have shown myself a muff muff more than once in my life. I was one then. What I ought to have done was, to have gone back the instant I had seen her enter ; what I really did was, to linger about behind the hedge, and try to get a glimpse through it. It skirted the garden : a long, narrow garden, running down from the side of the house.

It was but a minute or two in all. And I was really turning back when a servant maid in a kind of short brown bedgown (it's what Hannah calls the things at home), black petticoat, grey-stockings and wooden sabots, came out at the gate, carrying a flat basket made of black and white straw.

“ Does Monsieur Pell live there ? ” I asked, waiting until she was abreast.

“ Monsieur Qui ? ” said the girl.

“ Pell. Or Clement Pell.”

“ There is no gentlemans at all lives there,” returned she, changing her language to very understandable English. “ Only one Madame and her young meesses.”

I seemed to take in the truth in a minute : they were there, but he was not. “ I think they must be the friends I am in search of,” was my remark. “ What is the name ? ”

“ Brune.”

“ Brune ?—Oh, Brown. A lady and four young ladies ? ”

“ Yes, but that’s it. Bon jour, monsieur.”

She hurried onwards, the sabots clattering. I turned leisurely to take another look at the hedge and the little gate hidden in it, and saw a blue veil fluttering inwards. Constance Pell, deeper than I, had been gazing after me.

Where had the Squire and old Brandon got to ? Getting back to the hotel at the speed of my heels, I could not find either of them. Mr. Brandon might be taking a warm sea bath, the waiters thought, and the Squire a cold one. I went about to every likely place, and went in vain. The dinner-bell was ringing when they got in —tired to death ; having been for some prolonged ramble over beyond Capécure. I told them in their rooms while they were washing their hands—but as to stirring in it before dinner, both were too exhausted.

"I said I thought they must be here, Brandon," cried the Squire in triumph.

"He is not here now, according to Johnny," squeaked old Brandon.

After dinner more time was lost. First of all, in discussing what they should do; next, in whether it should be done that night. You see, it was not Mrs. Pell they wanted, but her husband. As it was then dark, it was thought best to leave it until morning.

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We went up in state about half-past ten; taking a coach, and passing en route the busy scene of the market. The coach seemed to have no springs: Mr. Brandon complained that it shook him to pieces. This was Saturday, you know. The Squire meant to be distantly polite to Mrs. and the Miss Pells, but to insist upon having the address given him of Mr. Pell. "We'll not take the coach quite up to the door," said he, "or we may not get in." Indeed, the getting in seemed to be a matter of doubt: old Brandon's opinion was that they'd keep every window and door barred, rather than admit us.

So the coach set us down outside the furthermost barrier of the Upper Town, and we walked on, I being pioneer, to the gate, went up the path, and knocked at the door.

As soon as the servant opened it—she had

the same brown bedgown on, the same grey stockings, and wooden sabots—the Squire dexterously slipped past her into the passage to make sure of a footing. She offered no opposition: drew back, in fact, to make room.

"I must come in; I have business here," said he, almost as if in apology.

"The Messieurs are free to enter," was her answer; "but they come to a house empty."

"I want to speak to Madame Brown," returned the Squire, in a determined tone.

"Madame Brown" (it's quite impossible to spell the word as she pronounced it) "and the Mees Browns are depart," she said. "They depart at daylight this morning, by the first convoi." Which meant "Train."

We were in the front parlour then: a small room, barely furnished. The Squire flew into one of his tempers: he thought the servant was playing with him. Old Brandon sat down against the wall, and nodded his head. He saw how it was—that they had really gone.

But the Squire stormed a little, and would not believe it. The girl, catching one word in ten, for he talked very fast, wondered at his anger.

The young gentlemans was at the place yesterday, she said, glancing at me: it was a malheur but they had come up before the morning, if they wanted so much to see Madame.

"She has not gone; I know better," roared the Squire. "Look here, young woman—what's your name, though?"

"Mathilde," said she, standing quite at ease, her hands turned on her hips and her elbows out.

"Well then, I warn you that it's of no use your trying to deceive *me*. I shall go into every room of this house till I find Madame Brown—and if you attempt to stop me, I'll bring the police up here. Tell her that in French, Johnny."

"I hear," said Mathilde, who had a very deliberate way of speaking. "I comprehend. The Messieurs go into the rooms if they like, but I go with, to see they not carry off any of the article. This is the salon."

Waiting for no further permission, he was out of the salon like a shot. Mr. Brandon stayed nodding against the wall; he had not the slightest reverence for the Squire's diplomacy at any time. The girl slipped off her sabots and put her feet into some green worsted slippers that stood in the narrow passage. My belief was she thought we wanted to look over the house with a view of taking it.

It was small, but great enough for a *salle à manger*, she said, showing the room behind—a little place that had literally nothing in it but an oval dining-table, some matting underneath, and six common bare chairs against the walls. Upstairs were four bed-rooms, bare also.

As to the fear of our earrying off any of the articles, we might have found a difficulty. Except beds, chairs, drawers, and washhand-stands, there was nothing to carry. Mrs. Brown and the Miss Browns were not there: and the rooms were in as much order as if they had not been occupied for a month. Mathilde had been at them all the morning. The Squire's face was a picture when he went down: he began to realize the fact that he was once more left in the lurch.

"It is much health up here, and the house fine," said the girl, leaving her shoes in the passage side by side with the sabots, and walking into the salon in her stockings without ceremony. "And if the Messieurs thought to let it, and would desire to let a good servant with it, I would be happy to serve them, me. I sleep in the house, or at home, as my patrons please; and I am very good to make the kitchen; and I——"

"So you have not found them," interrupted old Brandon sarcastically.

The Squire gave a kind of howl. He was put out—and no mistake. Mathilde, in answer to questions, readily told all she knew.

About six weeks ago, she thought it was—but no, it must be seven, now she remembered—Madame Brown and the four Mees Browns took this house of the propriétaire, one Monsieur Bourgois, marchand d'épicerie, and en-

gaged her as servant, recommended to Madame by M. Bourgois. Madame and the young ladies had lived very quietly, giving but little trouble; entrusted her to do all the commissions at the butcher's and elsewhere, and never questioned her fidelity in the matter of the sous received in change at market. The previous day when she got home with the pork chops and sausages, which she was going after when the young gentlemans spoke to her—nodding to me—Madame was in a state; all bouleversée; first because Mees Constance had been down to the town, which Madame did not like her to do; next because of a letter—

At this point the Squire made an interruption. Did she mean to imply that the ladies never went out?

No, never, continued Mathilde. Madame found herself not strong to walk out, and it was not proper for the young demoiselles to go walk without her—as the Messieurs would doubtless understand. But Mees Constance had the ennui with that, and three or four times she had walked out without Madame's knowing. Yesterday, par exemple, Madame was storming at her when she (Mathilde) came home with the pork, and the young ladies her sisters stormed at her—

"There; enough of that," snapped the Squire. "What took them away?"

That was the letter, resumed the girl in her

deliberate manner. It was the other thing, that letter was, that had contributed to the bouleversemement of Madame. The letter had been delivered while she was gone to the pork shop, by hand, she supposed ; it told Madame the triste news of the illness of a dear relative ; and Madame had to leave all at a blow in consequence. There was confusion. Madame and the young ladies packing, and she, Mathilde, when her dinner had been cooked and eaten, running quick for the propriétaire—who came back with her. Madame paid him up to the end of the next week, when the month would be finished and—that was all.

Old Brandon took up the word. “Mr. Brown ?—he was not here at all, was he ?”

“ No at all,” replied Mathilde. “ Madame’s fancy figured to her he might be coming one of these soon days : if so, I refer him to M. Bourgois.”

“ Refer him for what ?”

“ Nay, I not ask, monsieur. For the information, I conclude, of where Madame go and why she go. Madame talk to the propriétaire with the salon door shut.”

So that was all we got. Mathilde readily gave M. Bourgois’ address, and we went away. She had been civil through it all, and the Squire slipped a franc into her hand. By the profusion of thanks he received in return, it might have been a louis d’or.

Monsieur Bourgois' spice shop—grocer's in English—was in the Upper Town, not far from the convent of the Dames Ursulines. He said—speaking from behind his counter while weighing out a lump of butter—that Madame Brown had entrusted him with a sealed letter to Monsieur Brown in case he arrived. It contained, Madame had remarked to him, only a line or two to explain where they had gone, as he would naturally be disappointed at not finding them; and she had confided the trust to him that he would only deliver it into M. Brown's own hand. *He* did not know where Madame had gone. As M. Bourgois did not speak a word of English, or the Squire a word of French, it's hard to say when they'd have arrived at an explanation, left to themselves.

"Now look here," said Mr. Brandon, in his dry, but uncommonly clear-sighted way, as we went home, "*Clement Pell's expected to come here. We must keep a sharp watch on the boats.*"

The Squire did not see it. "As if he'd stay in England all this while, Brandon!"

"We don't know where he has stayed. I have thought all along he was as likely to be in England as elsewhere: there's no place a man's safer in, well concealed. The very fact of his wife and daughters remaining in this frontier town would be nearly enough to prove that he was still in England."

"Then why on earth *did* he stay?" retorted

the Squire. "Why has not he got away before?"

"I don't know. Might fear there was danger perhaps in making the attempt. He has lain perdu in some quiet corner; and now that he thinks the matter has partly blown over and the scent is less keen, he means to come. That's what his wife has waited for."

The Squire seemed to grasp the whole at once. "I wonder when he will be here?"

"Within a day or two, you may be sure, or not at all," said Mr. Brandon with a nod. "She'll write to stop his coming if she knows where to write to. The sight of Johnny Ludlow has startled her. You were a great muff to let yourself be seen, young Johnny."

"Yes, sir, I know I was."

"Live and learn, live and learn," said he, getting out his tin box. "One cannot put old heads upon young shoulders."

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Sunday morning. After breakfast I and Mr. Brandon were standing under the portecochère, looking about us; at the banking house opposite; at a man going into the chemist's shop with his hand tied up; at the marchand-de-coco with his gay attire and his jingling bells and his noisy tra-la-la-la: at anything, in short, that there might be to see, and so while away the half-hour before church time. The Squire had gone strolling out, saying he should

be back in time for service. People were passing down towards the port, little groups of them in twos and threes; apart from the servant-maids in their white caps, who were coming back from mass. One of the hotel waiters stood by us, his white napkin in his hand; he suddenly remarked, with the easy affability of the Frenchmen of his class (which, so far as I know, and I have seen more of France since then, never degenerates into disrespect), that some of these people might be expecting friends by the excursion boat and were going down to see it come in.

"What excursion boat?" asked Mr. Brandon of the waiter, quicker than he generally spoke.

"One from Ramsgate," the man replied. "It was to leave the other side very early, so as to get to Boulogne by ten o'clock; and to depart again at six in the afternoon." Mr. Brandon looked at the speaker; and then at me. Putting his hand on my shoulder, he drew me towards the port; charging the waiter to be sure and tell Mr. Todhetley when he returned, that we had gone to see the Ramsgate boat come in. It was past ten then.

"*If Clement Pell comes at all it will be by this excursion boat, Johnny,*" said he impressively as we hurried on.

"Why do you think so, Mr. Brandon?"

"Well, I do think so. The people who make excursion trips are not those likely to know him,

or of whom he would be afraid. He will hide himself away on it amid the crowd. It is Sunday also—another reason. What flag is that up on the signal post by the pier house, Johnny? Your eyes are younger than mine."

"It is the red one, sir."

"For a steamer in sight. She is not in yet then. It must be for *her*. It's hardly likely there'd be another one to come in this morning."

"There she is!" I exclaimed. For at that moment I caught sight in the distance of a steamer riding on close up to the harbour mouth, pitching a little in her course.

"Run you on, Johnny," said Mr. Brandon in excitement. "I'll come as quickly as I can, but my legs are not as fleet as yours. Get a good place close to the cords, and look out sharply."

It was a bright day, somewhat colder than it had been, and the wind high enough to make it tolerably rough for any but good sailors—as the sparkles of white foam on the blue sea betrayed. I got a good place behind the cord, close to the landing-ladder: a regular crowd had collected, early though it was, Sunday being an idle day with some of the French. The boat came in, was being moored fast below us, and was crowded with pale faces.

Up came the passengers, mounting the nearly perpendicular ladder: assisted by the men of the boat, below; and by two appariteurs, in their

cocked hats and Sunday clothes, above. It was nearly low water: another quarter of an hour and they'd have missed their tide: pleasant, that would have been, for the excursionists. As only one could ascend the ladder at once, I had the opportunity of seeing them all.

Scores came: my sight was getting half bewildered: and there had been none that resembled Clement Pell. Some of them looked fearfully ill still, and had not put up the ears of their caps or turned down their muffling coat and cloak collars; so, to get a good view of these faces was not possible—and Clement Pell might have already landed, for all I could be sure of to the contrary. Cloaks were tolerably common in those days, and travelling caps had ears to them.

It was like a stroke of fortune. A lady with a little boy behind her came up the ladder, and the man standing next to me—he was very tall and big—went at once into a state of excitement. “C'est toi! c'est toi, ma sœur!” he called out. She turned at the voice, and there ensued a batch of kissing on each of their two cheeks. A stout dame behind my shoulder, in a cap and cloak, pushed forward frantically to take and give a share in the kissing: but a douanier marched off the passenger towards the custom-house with some angry words. She retorted on him not to be so *difficile*, turned round and said she must wait for her other little one: while

the couple on this side leaned over the cord, lifted up the lad, and began to kiss *him*. Altogether there was no end of clatter and commotion. I was eclipsed : pushed back into the shade, and could only see daylight by fits and snatches.

The other little one was appearing over the top of the ladder then ; a mite of a girl child, apparently furnished with huge red whiskers and a red beard—for her face was held close to the face of the gentleman carrying her, and the red hair really belonged to him. I supposed he was the husband. He wore a full cloak, his cap-peak was drawn well over his eyebrows, and its ears covered his cheeks : in fact not much could be seen of him but his hands and his nose. Was he the husband ? The mother, thanking him volubly in broken English for his kind politeness in carrying up her little girl, would have taken her from him ; but he made a motion as if he'd carry her to the custom-house, and stepped onwards, looking neither to the left nor right. At that moment my tall neighbour and the stout dame raised a loud greeting to the child, clapping their hands and blowing kisses : the man put out his long arm and pulled at the sleeve of the young one's pelisse. It caused the gentleman to halt and look round. Enough to make him.

Why—where had I seen the eyes ? They were close to mine, and seemed quite familiar.

The remembrance flashed over me with a rush. They were Clement Pell's.

It is nearly the only thing about a man or woman that cannot be disguised—the expression of the eye. Once you are familiar with any one's eye and know its expression by heart; the soul that looks out of it; you cannot be mistaken in the eye, though you meet it in an African desert, its owner disguised as a cannibal.

But for seeing the eyes full, I should never have known him: got up, as he was, with all that false red hair. He went straight on instantly, not suspecting I was there, for the two hid me completely, and I had had but a view between the tall man's side and his uplifted arm. The little child's face was pressed close in front of Mr. Pell's as he went on: a feeling came over me that he was carrying it so, the better to conceal himself. As he went into the custom-house, I pushed backwards out of the crowd; saw Mr. Brandon, and whispered to him. He nodded quietly; as much as to say he thought Pell would come.

"Johnny, we must follow him: but we must not let him see us on any account. I dare say he is going all the way up to Mâquétra—or whatever you call the place."

Making our way round to the door by which the passengers were let out, we mixed with the mob gathered there, and waited. The custom-house was not particular with Sunday excurs-

sionists, and they came swarming out by dozens. When Pell appeared, I jogged Mr. Brandon's elbow.

The touters, shrieking out the merits of their respective hotels, and thrusting their cards in Pell's face, seemed to startle him, for he shrank back. Comprehending the next moment, he said No no, No no, on each side him, passed on to the waiting carriages, and stepped into one that was shut up. The driver was a couple of minutes at least at the door, taking his orders: perhaps there was some mutual bother, the one jabbering French, the other English. But the coach drove off at last.

"Now then, Johnny, for that other closed coach. We shall have to do without church this morning. Mind you make the coachman understand what he is to do."

"Suivez cette voiture qui vient de partir; mais pas trop près." The man gave back a hearty "Oui, monsieur," as if he understood the case.

It was a crawling kind of journey. The first coach did not hurry itself, and took bye-ways to get to its destination. It turned into the Rue de la Coupe, opposite our hotel, went through the Rue de l'Hôpital, and thence to unknown regions. All I knew was, we went up a worse hill than that of the Grande Rue, and arrived circuitously at Mâquétra. Mr. Brandon had stretched his head out as we passed the hotel, but could not see the Squire.

"It's his affair, you know, Johnny. Not mine."

Clement Pell got out at his gate, and went in. We followed cautiously, and found the house-door on the latch, Mathilde having probably forgotten to close it after admitting Mr. Pell. They stood in the salon : Mathilde in a handsome light chintz gown and white stockings and shoes, for she had been to the nine o'clock mass ; he with a strangely bewildered, blank expression on his face as he listened to her explanation.

"Yes, monsieur, it is sure they are depart ; it is but the morning of yesterday. The propriétaire, he have the letter for you that Madame confide to him. He—Tiens, voici encore ces Messieurs !"

Surprise at our appearance in the room must have made her change her language. Clement Pell gave one look at us and turned his face to the window, hoping to escape unrecognized. Mr. Brandon ordered me to the English church in the Upper Town, saying I should not be much late for that, and told Mathilde he did not want her.

"I shall make the little promenade and meet my bon ami," observed Mathilde with independence, as I proceeded to do as I was bid. And, what took place between the two we left, can only be related at second-hand.

"Now, Mr. Pell, will you spare me your attention ?" began Mr. Brandon.

Clement Pell turned then, and took off his cloak and cap, seeing that it would be worse than useless to attempt to keep the farce going. With the red wig on his head and the red hair on his face, no unobservant man would then have recognized him for the great ex-financier.

Mr. Brandon was cold, uncompromising, but civil; Clement Pell at first subdued and humble. Taking courage after a bit, he became slightly restive, somewhat inclined to be insolent.

"It is a piece of assurance for you to come here at all, sir; tracking me over my threshold to my very hearthstone, as if you were a detective officer. What is the meaning of it? I don't owe you money."

"I have told you the meaning," replied Mr. Brandon—feeling that his voice had never been more squeaky, but showing no sign of wrath. "The affair is not mine at all, but Squire Todhetley's. I was down on the port when you landed—went to look for you, in fact; the Squire did not happen to be in the way, so I followed you up in his place."

"With what object?"

"Why dear me, Mr. Pell, you are not deaf. I mentioned the object; the Squire wants his two hundred pounds refunded. A very clever trick, your getting it of him!"

Clement Pell drew in his lips; his face had no more colour in it than chalk. He sat with

his back to the wall by the window, his hands restlessly playing with his steel watch-chain—what had gone with the thick gold one he used to wear? Mr. Brandon had a chair by the table, and faced him.

“Perhaps you would like me to refund to you all my creditors’ money wholesale, as well as that of Mr. Todhetley!” retorted Clement Pell with aggravated mockery.

“I have nothing to do with them, Mr. Pell. Neither, I imagine, does Mr. Todhetley intend to make their business his. Let each man mind alone his own course and stand or fall by it. If you choose to assure me you don’t owe a fraction to anybody else in the world, I shall not tell you that you do. I am speaking now for my friend, Squire Todhetley: I would a great deal rather he was here to deal with you himself; but action has accidentally been forced upon me.”

“I know that I owe a good deal of money: or, rather, that a good many people have lost money through me,” returned Clement Pell after a pause. “It is my misfortune; not my fault.”

Mr. Brandon coughed a dry cough. “As to its not being your fault, Mr. Pell, the less said about that the better. It was in your power to pull up in time, I conclude, when you first saw things were going wrong.”

Clement Pell lifted his hand to his forehead,

as if he felt a pain there. It tilted the red hair back ever so little and made him look more like himself. "You don't know; you don't know," he irritably said,—a great deal of impatience in his tone.

"No, I'm thankful that I *don't*," said Mr. Brandon, taking out his tin box and coolly eating a lozenge. "I am very subject to heartburn, Mr. Pell. If ever you get it, you try magnesia lozenges. An upset, such as this affair of yours has been, would drive a man of my nerves into a lunatic asylum."

"It may do the same by me before I have done with it," returned Clement Pell. And Mr. Brandon thought he meant what he said.

"Any way, it is rumoured that some of those who are ruined will be there before long, Mr. Pell. You might perhaps feel a qualm of conscience if you saw the misery it has entailed."

"And do you think I don't feel it?" returned Mr. Pell, catching up his breath. "You are mistaken if you suppose I do not."

"About Squire Todhetley's two hundred pounds, sir?" resumed old Brandon, swallowing the last of the lozenge. "Is it convenient to you to give it me?"

"No, it is not," was the firm answer. And he seemed to be turning restive again.

"But I will *thank* you to do so, Mr. Pell."

"I cannot do so."

"And not to make excuses over it. They will only serve to waste time."

"I have not got the money: I cannot give it."

Upon that they set on again, hammer and tongs. Mr. Brandon insisting upon the money; Pell vowing to goodness that he had not got it, and could not and would not give so much as a ten-pound note of it. Old Brandon never lost his temper, never raised his voice: but he said a thing or two that must have stung Pell's pride. At the end of twenty minutes, he was no nearer the money than before. Pell's patience gave signs of wearing out: Mr. Brandon could have gone quietly on till bed-time.

"You must be aware that this is not a simple debt, Mr. Pell. It is—in fact—something worse. For your own sake it may be well to refund it."

"Once more I say I cannot."

"Am I to understand that is as much as to say you will not?"

"If you like to take it so. It is most painful to me, Mr. Brandon, to have to meet you in this spirit, but you force it on me. The case is this: I am not able to refund the debt to Squire Todhetley, and he has no power to enforce his claim to it."

"I don't know that."

"I do though. It is best to be plain, as we have come to this, Mr. Brandon; and then perhaps you will bring the interview to an end,

and leave me at peace. You have no power over me in this country; none whatever. Before you can obtain that, there are certain forms and ceremonies to be gone through in a legal court; you must make over the——”

“Squire Todhetley’s is not a case of debt,” interrupted old Brandon. “If it were, he would have no right in honour to come here and seek payment over the other creditors.”

“It is a case of debt, and nothing else. As debt only could you touch me upon it here—and not then until you have proved it and got judgment upon it in England. Say, if you will, that I have committed murder or forged bank-notes—you could not touch me here unless the French government gave me up at the demand of the English government. Get all the police of the town to this room if you will, Mr. Brandon, and they would only laugh at you. They have no power over me. I have committed no offence against this country.”

“Look here,” said old Brandon, nodding his head. “I know a bit about French law; perhaps as much as you: knew it years ago. What you say is true enough: an Englishman, whether debtor or criminal, in his own land, cannot be touched here, unless certain forms and ceremonies, as you express it, are first gone through. But you have rendered yourself amenable to French law on another point, Clement Pell; I could consign you to the police this

moment, if I chose, and they would have to take you."

Clement Pell quite laughed at what he thought the worthless boast. But he might have known old Brandon better. "What is my crime, sir?"

"You have come here and are staying here under a false name—Brown. That is a crime in the sight of French law: and one that the police, if they get to know of it, are obliged to take cognizance of."

"No!" exclaimed Clement Pell, his face changing a little.

"Yes," said Mr. Brandon. "Were I to give you up for it to-day, they would put you on board the first boat leaving for your own country. Once on the opposite shore, you may judge whether Squire Todhetley would let you escape again."

It was all true. Mr. Pell saw that it was. His restless fingers nervously trembled; his pale face had a piteous aspect.

"You need not be afraid of me: I am not likely to do it," said Mr. Brandon: "I do not think the Squire would. But you see now what lies within his power. Therefore I would recommend you to come to terms with him."

Clement Pell rubbed his brow with his handkerchief. He was driven into a corner.

"I have told you truth, Mr. Brandon, in saying that I am not able to repay the two hundred pounds. I am not. Will he take half of it?"

"I cannot tell. I have no authority to say he will."

"Then I suppose he must come up here. As it has come to this, I had better see him. If he will accept one hundred pounds, and undertake not to molest me further, I will hand it to him. It will leave me almost entirely without means: but you have got me in a hole. Stay a moment—a thought is striking me. Are there any more of my creditors in the town at your back, Mr. Brandon?"

"Not that I am aware of. I have seen none."

"On your honour?"

Mr. Brandon opened his little eyes, and took a stare at Pell. "My word is the same as my honour, sir. Always has been, and always will be."

"I beg your pardon. A man, driven to my position, naturally fears an enemy at every corner. And—if my enemies were to find me out here, they might be too much for me."

"Of course they would be," assented Mr. Brandon by way of comfort.

"Will you go for Squire Todhetley? What is done, must be done to-day, for I shall be away by the first train in the morning."

Shrewd old Brandon considered the matter before speaking. "By the time I get back here with the Squire you may have already taken your departure, Mr. Pell."

"No, on my honour. How should I be able to do it? There's no train leaves the town

before six to-night: the water is low in the harbour and no boat could float. As it has come to this I will see Squire Todhetley: and the sooner the better."

"I will trust you," said Mr. Brandon.

"Time was when I was deemed more worthy of trust: perhaps was more worthy of it"—and the involuntary tears rose to his eyes. "Mr. Brandon, believe me—no man has suffered by this as I have suffered. Do you think I did it for pleasure?—or to afford myself wicked gratification? No. I'd have forfeited nearly all my remaining life to prevent the smash. My affairs got into their awful state by degrees; and I had not the power to retrieve them. God alone knows what the penalty has been to me—and what it will be to my life's end."

"Ay. I can picture it pretty tolerably, Mr. Pell."

"No one can picture it," he returned with emotion. "Look at my ruined family—the position of my sons and daughters. Not one of them can hold up their heads in the world again without the consciousness that they may be pointed at as the children of Clement Pell the swindler. What is to be their future?—how are they to get along? You must have heard many a word of abuse applied to me lately, Mr. Brandon: but there are few men on this toilsome earth more in need of compassion

than I—if misery and suffering can constitute the need. When morning breaks, I wish the day was done; when night comes, I toss and turn and wonder how I shall live through it."

"I am sorry for you," said Mr. Brandon, moved to pity, for he saw how the man needed it. "Were I you, I would go back home and face my debts. Face the trouble, and in time you may be able to live it down."

Clement Pell shook his head hopelessly. Had it been debt alone, he might never have come away.

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The sequel to all this had yet to come. Perhaps some of you may guess it. Mr. Brandon pounced upon the Squire as he was coming out of church in the Rue du Temple, and took him back in another coach. Arrived at the house they found the door fast. Mathilde appeared presently, arm in arm with her sweetheart—a young man in white boots with earrings in his ears. Was M. Brown of depart, she repeated, in answer to the Squire's impulsive question: but no, certainly he was not. And she gave them the following information.

When she returned after midday, she found M. Brown all impatience, waiting for her to show him the way to the house of Monsieur Bourgois, that he might claim Madame's letter. When they reached the shop, it had only the fille de

boutique in it. Monsieur the patron was out making a promenade, the fille de boutique said: he might be home possibly for the shutting up at two o'clock.

Upon that, M. Brown decided to make a little promenade himself until two o'clock; and Mathilde, she made a further promenade on her own account: and had now come up, before two, to get the door open. Such was her explanation. If the gentlemans would be at the pains of sitting down in the salon, without doubt M. Brown would not long retard.

They sat down. The clock struck two. They sat on, and the clock struck three. Not until then did any thought arise that Clement Pell might not keep faith with them. Mathilde's opinion, freely expressed, was that M. Brown, being strange to the town, had lost himself amid its mazes. She ran to the grocer's shop again, and found it closely shut up: evidently nobody was there.

Four o'clock, five o'clock; and no Mr. Brown. They gave him up then; it seemed quite certain that he had given them the slip. Starving with hunger, exploding with anger, the Squire took his wrathful way back to the hotel: Mr. Brandon was calm, and sucked his magnesia lozenges. Clement Pell was a rogue to the last.

There came to Mr. Brandon the following morning, through the Boulogne post-office, a

note ; on which he had to pay five sous. It was from Clement Pell, written in pencil. He said that when he made the agreement with Mr. Brandon never a thought crossed him of not keeping faith : but that while he was waiting about for the return of the grocer who held his wife's letter, he saw an Englishman come off the ramparts—a creditor who knew him well and would be sure to deliver him up, were it in his power, if he caught sight of him. It struck him, Clement Pell, with a panic : he considered that he had only one course left open to him—and that was to get away from the place at once and in the quietest manner he was able. There was a message to Mr. Todhetley to the effect that he would send him the hundred pounds later if he could. Throughout the whole letter ran a vein of despairing sadness, according with what he had said to Mr. Brandon ; and the Squire's heart was touched.

"After all, Brandon, the fellow *is* to be pitied. It's a frightful position : enough to make a man lose heart for good and all. I'm not sure that I should have taken the hundred pounds from him."

"That's more than probable," returned old Brandon drily. "It remains a question, though, in my mind, whether he did see the creditor and did take a panic : or whether both are not invented to cover his precipitate departure with the hundred pounds."

How he got away from the town we never knew. The probability was, that he had walked to the first station, after Boulogne, on the Paris railroad, and there taken the evening train. And whether he had presented himself again at Monsieur Bourgois' shop, that excellent tradesman, who did not return home until ten on Sunday night, was unable to say. Any way, M. Bourgois held the letter yet in safety. So the chances are, that Mr. and Mrs. Pell are still dodging about the earth in search of each other, after the fashion of the Wandering Jew.

And that's a true account of our visit to Boulogne after Clement Pell. Mr. Brandon calls it to this hour a wild-goose chase: certainly it turned out a fruitless one. But we had a lucky voyage back, the sea as calm as a mill-pond.

## XXVI.

## AT WHITNEY HALL.

IT has often been in my mind to tell of John Whitney's death. You will say it is too sad and serious for a paper. But it is well to have serious thoughts brought before us at certain seasons. This is one: seeing that it's the beginning of a new year, and that every year takes us nearer to another life whether we are old or whether we are young.\*

Some of them thought his illness might never have come on but for an accident that happened. It is quite a mistake. The accident had nothing to do with the later illness. Sir John and Lady Whitney could tell you so as well as I. John was always one of those sensitive, thoughtful, religious boys that somehow don't seem so fit for earth as heaven.

"Now mind, you boys," cried Sir John to us at breakfast. "There's just a thin coating of ice on the lake and ponds, but it is only surface

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ice, and it won't bear. Don't any of you venture on it."

"We will not, sir," replied John, who was the most obedient son living.

There's not much to be done in the way of out-door sports when snow lies on the ground. Crowding round the children's play-room window later, all the lot of us, we looked out on a white landscape. Snow lodged on the branches of the trees, it hid the grass of the fields, it covered the hills in the distance.

"It's an awful sell," cried Bill Whitney and Tod nearly in a breath. "No hunting, and no shooting, and no nothing. The ponds won't bear; snowballing's common. One might as well lie in bed."

"And what sort of a 'sell' do you suppose it is for the poor men who are thrown out of work by the snow?" asked Sir John, who had come in, reading a newspaper, and was airing his back at the fire. "Their work and wages are stopped, and they can't get bread for their children. You boys are dreadfully to be pitied, you are!"

He tilted his steel spectacles up on his good old red nose, and nodded to us sarcastically. Harry, the pert one of the family, answered.

"Well, papa, and it is a settler for us boys to get our fun spoiled. As to the working-men —oh, they are used to it."

Sir John stared at him for a full minute.

" If I thought you said that from your heart, Mr. Harry, I'd order you from my presence. No son of mine shall get into the habit of making unfeeling speeches, even in jest."

Sir John meant it. We saw that Harry's words had really vexed him. John broke the silence.

" Papa, if I should live to be ever in your place," he said, in his nice quiet voice, that somehow *always* had a tone of thoughtfulness in it, even when at play with the rest of us at old Frost's, " I shall make a point of paying my labourers' wages in full this wintry time, just the same as though they worked. It is not their fault that they are idle."

Sir John stared at *him* now. " What d'ye mean by 'if you live,' lad?"

John considered. The words had slipped from him without any particular thought at all. People use such modes of speech. It was odd though, when we came to remember it a long while afterwards, that he should have said it just that one day.

" I recollect a frost that lasted fourteen weeks, boys," said Sir John. " That was in 1814. They held a fair on the Thames, we heard, and roasted an ox whole on it. Get a frost to last all that while, and you'd soon tire of paying full wages for nothing, John."

" But, father, what else could I do—or ought I to do? I could not let them starve—or break up their poor homes by going into the work-

house. I should fear that some time, in return, God might break up mine."

Sir John smiled. John was so very earnest always when he took a serious matter up. Letting the question drop, Sir John lowered his spectacles, and went out with his newspaper. Presently we saw him going round to the farm-yard in his great-coat and beaver gaiters. John sat down near the fire and took up a book he was fond of—"Sintram."

This was Old Christmas Day. Tod and I had come over to Whitney Hall for a week, and two days of it were already gone. We liked being there, and the time seemed to fly. Tod and Bill still stood staring and grumbling at the snow, wishing the frost would get worse, or go. Harry went out whistling; Helen sat down with a yawn.

"Anna, there's a skein of blue silk in that workbag behind you. Get it out and hold it for me to wind."

Anna, who was more like John in disposition than any of them, always good and gentle, got the silk; and they began to wind it. In the midst of it, Harry burst in with a terrific shout, dressed up as a bear, and trying to upset everybody. In the confusion Anna dropped the silk on the carpet, and Helen boxed her ears.

John looked up from his book. "You should not do that, Helen."

"What does she go and drop the silk for,

then—careless thing !” retorted Helen, who was quick in temper. “ Once soil that light shade of blue, and it can’t be used. You mind yourself, John.”

John looked at them both. At Helen, snatching up the silk from the floor ; at Anna, who was struggling to keep down her tears, under the infliction, because Tod was present. She’d not have minded me. John said no more. He had a very nice face without much colour in it ; dark hair, and large grey-blue eyes that seemed to be always looking out for something they did not see. He was sixteen then, upright and slender. All the world liked John Whitney.

Later on in the day we were running races in the broad walk, that was so shady in summer. The whole of us. The high laurel hedges on either side had kept the snow from drifting, and it hardly lay there at all. We gave the girls a third of the run, and they mostly beat us. After an hour of this, tired and hot, we gave in, and dispersed different ways. John and I went towards the lake to see whether the ice was getting thicker, talking of school and school interests as we went along. Old Frost’s grounds were in view, which naturally put us in mind of the past : and especially of the great event of the half year—the sad fate of Archie Hearn.

“ Poor little Hearn !” he exclaimed. “ I did feel his death, and no mistake. That is, I felt for his mother. I think, Johnny, if I could have

had the chance offered me, I'd have died myself to let him live."

"That's easier said than done—if it came to the put-to, Whitney."

"Well, yes it is. She had nobody but him, you see. And to think of her coming into the school that time and saying she forgave the fellow—whoever it was. I've often wondered whether Barrington had cause to feel it."

"She is just like her face, Whitney—good. I've hardly ever seen a face I like as much as Mrs. Hearn's."

John Whitney laughed a little. They all did at my likes and dislikes of faces. "I was reading a book the other day, Johnny—See there! that poor little robin!" he broke off. "It looks starved, and it must have its nest somewhere. I have some crumbs of biscuit in my pocket."

It came into my head, as he dived into his trousers' pocket and scattered them, that he had brought the supply out for these stray birds. But if I write for ever I could not make you understand the thoughtfulness of John Whitney.

"Hark, Johnny! What's that?"

Cries, shrieks, screams, sobs. We were close at the end of the walk then and rushed out. Anna met us in a dreadful state of agitation, her breath gone, her voice shaking. Charley! Charley was in the lake! Whitney caught the truth before I did, and was off like a shot.

The nurse, Willis, was dancing frantically about on the water's edge ; the children danced and roared. Willis said Master Charles had slipped on to the ice "surreptitiously" when her back was turned, and gone souse in. John Whitney had already plunged in after his little brother ; his coat, jacket, and waistcoat lying on the bank. William Whitney and Tod, hearing the noise, came rushing up.

"Mamma sent me to tell nurse they had been out long enough, and were to come in," sobbed Anna, shaking like a leaf. "While I was giving her the message, Charley fell in. Oh, what will be done?"

That was just like Anna. Helen would have been cool as a cucumber. Done? Why, John had already saved him. The coating of ice, not much thicker than a shilling, and breaking into small pieces whenever touched, hardly impeded him at all. Bill and Tod knelt down and lent hands, and they were landed like a couple of drowned rats, Charley howling with all his might. John, thoughtful always, wrapped his great-coat round the lad, and the other two went off with him to the house.

John caught a cold. Not very much of one. He was hot, you see, when he plunged in ; and he had only his jacket to put on over his wet clothes to walk home in. Not much of a cold, I say ; but he never seemed to be quite the same after that day : and when all was over

they would date his illness back from it. Old Featherstone physicked him; and the days passed on.

"I can't think why John should be so feverish," Lady Whitney would remark. His hands would be hot, and his cheeks crimson just up by the cheekbones, and he did not eat. Featherstone failed to alter the state of things; so one day Sir John took him into Worcester to Mr. Carden.

Mr. Carden did not seem to think much of it—as we heard over at Dyke Manor. There was nothing amiss with the lungs or the chest, or any other vital part. He changed the physic that Featherstone had been giving, and said he saw no present reason why John should not go back to school. Sir John, standing by in his old spectacles, listening and looking, caught up the words "at present" and asked Mr. Carden whether he had any particular meaning in saying it. But Mr. Carden would not say. Sending his pleasant blue eyes straight into Sir John's, he assured him that he did not anticipate mischief, or see cause to fear it: he thought, he hoped, that, once John was back with his studies and his companions, he would recover tone and be as well as ever.

And Mr. Carden's physic did good; for when Whitney came back after the holidays, he seemed himself again. Lady Whitney gave five hundred directions to Mrs. Frost about the

extras he was to eat and drink, Hall being had in to assist at the conference. The rest of us rather wished for fevers ourselves, if they entailed beaten-up eggs and wine and jelly between meals. He did his lessons; and he came out in the play-ground, though he did not often join in play, especially rough play: and he went for walks with us or stayed in, as inclination led him, for he was allowed liberty in all things. By Easter he had grown thinner and weaker: and yet there was no specific disease. Mr. Carden came over to Whitney Hall and brought Dr. Hastings, and they could not find any: but they said he was not strong and wanted care. It was left to John whether he would go back to school after Easter, or not: and he said he should like to go. And so the weeks went on again.

We could not see any change at all in him. It was too gradual, I suppose. He seemed very quiet, strangely thoughtful always, as though he were inwardly puzzling over some knotty question hard to undo. Any quarrel or fight would put him out beyond belief: he'd come up with his gentle voice, and stretch out his hands with a beseeching kind of movement to part the disputants, and did not rest until he had made peace. Wolfe Barrington, with one of his sneers, said Whitney's nerves were out of joint. Once or twice we saw him reading a pocket-Bible. It's true. And there was

something in his calm face and in his blue-grey eyes that hushed those who would have ridiculed.

"I say, Whitney, have you heard?" I asked.  
"The Doctor means to have the playground enlarged for next half. Part of the field is to be taken-in."

"Does he?" returned Whitney. It was the twenty-ninth of May and a half-holiday. The rest had gone in for Hare-and-Hounds. I stayed with Whitney, because he'd be dull. We were leaning on the playground gate.

"Blair let it out this morning at mathematics. By the way, Whitney, you did not come in to them."

"I did not feel quite up to mathematics today, Johnny."

"I am glad it's going to be done though. Are not you?"

"It won't make much difference to me, I expect. I shall not be here."

"Not here!"

"I don't think I shall."

He had his chin on his hands atop of the gate. His eyes were gazing out straight before him; looking—as I said before—for something they did not see.

"Do you think you shall be too ill to come next half, Whitney?"

"Yes, I do."

"Are you feeling worse?" I asked after a

minute or two, taken up with staring at the blue sky.

"That's what they are always asking me indoors," he remarked. "It's just this, Johnny, I don't feel worse from day to day; I could not say any one morning that I feel a shade worse than I did the previous one: but when I look back a few weeks or months; say, for example, to the beginning of the half, or at Easter, and remember how very well I was then, compared with what I am now, I know that I must be a great deal worse. I could not do now what I did then. Why! I quite believe I might have gone in for Hare-and-Hounds then, if I had chosen. Fancy my trying it now!"

"But you don't have any pain."

"None. I'm only weak and tired; always feeling to want to lie down and rest. Every bit of strength and energy has gone out of me, Johnny."

"You'll get well," I said hastily.

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Don't you want to?" It was his cool answer made me ask it.

"Why, of course I do."

"Well then?"

"I'll tell you, Johnny Ludlow; there is a feeling within me, and I can't say why it's there or whence it comes, that's always saying to me I shall *not* get well. At least, whenever I think about it. It seems just as though it

were telling me that, instead of getting well, it will be—be just the opposite."

"What a dreadful thing to have, Whitney! It must be like a fellow with a skeleton in his stomach!"

"Not at all dreadful. It never frightens me or worries me. Just as the rest of you look forward naturally to coming back here, and living out your lives to be men, and all that, so I seem *not* to look to it. The feeling has nothing bad at all about it. If it had, I daresay it would not be there."

I stood on the small gate and took a swing. It pained me to hear him say this.

"I suppose you mean, Whitney, that you may be going to die?"

"That's about it, Johnny. I don't know it; I may get well, after all."

"But you don't think you shall?"

"No, I don't. Little Herne first; I next. Another ought to follow, to make the third."

"You speak as easily as if it were only going out to tea, Whitney!"

"Well, I feel easy. I do, indeed."

"Most of us would be daunted, at any rate."

"Exactly. Because you are not going to die. Johnny Ludlow, I am getting to *think* a great deal; to have a kind of insight that I never had before: and I see how very wisely and kindly all things are ordered."

If he had gone in for a bout of tumbling

like the mountebanks, I could not have been as much surprised as to hear him say this. It was more in Mrs. Frost's line than in ours. It laid hold on me once; and from that self-same moment, I believed that John Whitney would die.

"Look here, Whitney. It is evident, by what you say about failing strength, that you must be getting worse. Why don't you tell them at home, and go there and be nursed?"

"I don't want to be nursed. I am not ill enough for it. I'm better as I am: here, amongst you fellows. As to telling them—time enough for that. And what is there to tell? They see for themselves I am not as strong as I was: there's nothing else to tell."

"There's this feeling that you say lies upon you."

"What, and alarm them for nothing? I daresay! There *would* be a hullabaloo. I should be rattled home in the old family coach and Carden would be sent for, post haste, Hastings also, and—well, you are a muff, Jolinnny. I've told you this because I like you, and because I thought you would understand me; which is more than the other fellows would. Mind you keep counsel."

"Well, you ought to be at home."

"I am better here, while I am as I am. The holidays will be upon us soon. I expect I shall not come back afterwards."

Now, if you ask me till next week, I could not give a better account of the earlier part of Johnny Whitney's illness than this. He was ill; and yet, nobody could find out why he should be ill, or what it was that was the matter with him. Just about this time, Featherstone took up the notion that it was "liver," and dosed him for it. For one thing, he said Whitney must ride out daily, good hard riding. So a horse would be brought over from the Hall by the old groom, and they'd go out together. During the Whitsun week, when Sir John was away from Parliament, he came also and rode with him. But no matter whether they went slow or fast, Whitney would come back fit to die with the exertion. Upon that, Featherstone changed his opinion, and said the riding must be given up.

By the time the midsummer holidays came, anybody might see the change in Whitney. It struck Mrs. Frost particularly when he went in to say good-bye to her.

"For the last time, I think," he said in a low tone, but with a smiling countenance, as she stood holding his hand.

Mrs. Frost knew what he meant, and her face, always so pale and delicate, went red.

"I trust not," she answered. "But—God knows what is best."

"Oh yes, and we do not. Farewell, dear Mrs. Frost. Thank you truly for all your care and kindness."

The tears stood in her eyes. *She* was to be the next one to go out from us, after John Whitney.

Wolfe Barrington stood at the door as he passed. "Good luck to you, Whitney," said he, carelessly. "I'd throw all those nerves of yours over if I were you, before I came back again."

Whitney turned back and held out his hand. "Thank you, Barrington," he replied in his kind, truthful voice; "you wish me well, I know. Good luck to *you*, in all ways; and I mean it with my whole heart. As to nerves, I do not think I possess any, though some of you have been pleased to joke about it."

They shook hands, these two, little thinking that, in one sense, the life of both would soon be blighted. In a short while, only a few weeks, Wolfe was to be brought nearer to immediate death than even John Whitney.

Not until he was at home and had settled down among them, did his people notice the extreme change in him. Lady Whitney, flurried and anxious, sent for Sir John from London. Mr. Carden was summoned then, and old Featherstone met him often in consultation. Dr. Hastings came once or twice, but he was an invalid himself then; and Mr. Carden, as everybody knew, was equal to anything. Still—it was a positive fact—there was no palpable disease to grapple with in John, only the weakness and the wasting away. No cough, no damaged lungs. "If only it were gout or dropsy, one

would know what to do," grumbled Featherstone; but Mr. Carden kept his own counsel. They decided that John should go to the seaside for change.

"As if it could do me any good!" he remonstrated. "*Change* won't make any difference to me. And I'd a great deal rather stay quietly at home."

"Why do you say it will not do you good?" cried Lady Whitney, who happened to hear him.

"Because, mother, I feel nearly sure that it will not."

"Oh dear!" cried she, flurried out of her senses, "John's going to turn rebellious now."

"No I am not," said John, smiling at her. "I mean to go without any rebellion at all."

"There's my best lad," said she fondly. "Change of scene is all pleasure, John. It's not like going through a course of nauseous pills and powders."

Well, they all went to the seaside, and at the end of five weeks they all came back again. John had to be assisted out of the carriage, from fatigue. There could be no mistake now.

After that, it was just a gradual decay. The sinking was so imperceptible that he seemed to be at a stand-still always, and some days he was as well as anybody need to be. His folks did not give up hope of him: nobody does in such cases. John was cheerful, and often merry.

"It can't be consumption," Sir John would say. "We've nothing of the kind in our family; neither on his mother's side nor mine. A young sister of hers died of a kind of decline: but what can that have to do with John?"

Why, clearly nothing. As everybody agreed.

At one of Mr. Carden's visits, Sir John tackled him as he was going away, asking what it was. The two were shut up together talking for a quarter of an hour, Mr. Carden's horses—he generally used to come over in his carriage—growing rampant the while. Sir John did not seem much wiser when the sitting was over. He only shuffled his spectacles about on his old red nose—as he used to do when perplexed. Talking of noses: you never saw two so much alike as his and the Squire's, particularly when they got into a temper.

Not very long after they were back from the seaside, and directly after the school met, occurred the accident to Barrington. You have heard of it before: and it has nothing to do with the present paper. John Whitney took it to heart.

"He is not fit to die," Bill heard him say.  
"He is not fit to die."

One morning John walked over to see him, resting on stiles and gates between whiles. It was not over far; but he was good for little now. Barrington was lying flat on his bed, Mrs.

Hearn waiting on him. Wolfe was not tamed then.

"It's going to be a race between us, I suppose, Whitney," said he, rather sarcastically. "You look like a walking shadow."

"A race?" replied Whitney, not taking him.

"In that black-plumed slow coach that carries dead men to damp graves, and leaves 'em there. A race which of us two will get the honour of starting first. What a nice prospect! I always hated clayey soil. Fancy lying in it for ever and a day!"

"Fancy, rather, being borne aloft on angels' wings, and living with God in heaven for ever and ever!" cried Whitney earnestly. "Oh, Barrington, fancy *that*."

"You'd do for a parson," retorted Barrington.

The interview was not satisfactory : Whitney so solemnly earnest, Wolfe so mockingly sarcastic : but they parted good friends. It was the last time they ever saw each other in life.

And thus a few more weeks went on.

Now old Frost had one most barbarous custom. And that was, letting the boys take the few days of Michaelmas holiday, or not, as the parents pleased. Naturally, very few did please. I and Tod used to go home : but that was no rule for the rest. We did not go home this year. A day or two before the time, Sir John Whitney rode over to Dyke Manor.

" You had better let the two boys come to us for Michaelmas," he said to the Squire. " John wants to see them, and they'll cheer us up. It's anything but a lively house, I can tell you, Todhetley, with the poor lad lying as he is."

" I can't see why he should not get well," said the Squire.

" I'm sure I can't. Carden ought to be able to bring him round."

" So he ought," assented the Squire. " It would be quite a feather in his cap, after all these months of sickness. As to the boys, you may be troubled with 'em, and welcome, Sir John, if you care to be."

And so, we went to Whitney Hall that year, instead of home.

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John had the best rooms, the two that opened into one another. Sometimes he'd be on the bed in one, sometimes on the sofa in the other. Then he would walk about on somebody's arm ; or sit in the easy chair at the west window, the bright-red setting sun playing on his wasted face. Barrington had called him a shadow : you should have seen him now. John had talked to Barrington of angels : he was just like an angel in the house himself. And—will you believe it ?—they had not given up hope of his getting well again. I wondered the

doctors did not tell Lady Whitney the plain truth, and have done with it : but to tell more professional truth than they can help, is what doctors rarely put themselves out of the way to do.

And still—the *shadow* of the coming death lay on the house. In the hushed voices and soft tread of the servants, in the subdued countenances of Sir John and Lady Whitney, and in the serious spirit that prevailed, the shadow might be seen. It is good to be in such a house as this : for the lessons learnt may take fast hold of the heart. It was good to hear John Whitney talk : and we never quite made out whether he was telling of dreams or realities.

Tod was out of his element : as much so as a fish, cast on the dry bank, is out of water. He had plenty of sympathy with John, would have made him well at any cost of sacrifice to himself : but he could not do with the hushed house, in which all things seemed to give way to that shadow of the coming presence in it. Tod, in his way, was religious enough, more so than some fellows are ; but dying beds he did not understand, and would a great deal rather have been shooting the partridges than be near one. He and Bill Whitney—who was just as uncomfortable as Tod—used to get off anywhere whenever they could. They did not forget John. They would bring him all kinds of

things; flowers, fruit, blackberries as big as Willis's thimble, and the finest nuts off the trees; but they did not care to sit long with him.

John was awake one afternoon, and I was sitting beside him. He sat in his easy chair at the window—as he liked to do at this hour when the evening was drawing on. The intensely serene look that for some time now had taken possession of his face, I have never seen surpassed in boy or man.

"How quiet the house is, Johnny!" he said, touching my hand. "Where are they all?"

"Helen and Anna went out, to ask after Mrs. Frost and Barrington. And the boys—but I think you know it—are gone with Sir John to Evesham. You'd not call the house quiet, John, if you could hear the row going on in the nursery."

He smiled a little. "Charley's a dreadful Turk: none of us elder ones were ever half as bad. Where's the mother?"

"Half an hour ago she was shut up with some visitors in the drawing room. It's those Miss Clutterbucks, John: they always stay long enough to hold a county meeting."

"Is Mrs. Frost worse—that the girls have gone to ask after her?" he resumed.

"I think so. Harry said Dr. Frost shook his

head about her five ways at once, when they saw him this morning."

"She'll never be strong," remarked John. "And perhaps the bother of the school is too much for her."

"Hall takes a good deal of that, you know."

"But Hall cannot take the feeling of responsibility; the true care. That must lie on Mrs. Frost."

What a beautiful sky it was! The sun was getting near the horizon in a glow of red and purple; showers of small clouds of a brilliant gold were dispersed above on the blue canopy. John Whitney sat gazing out in silence. There was nothing he liked so much as looking at these beauteous sunsets.

"Go and play, will you, Johnny?"

The piano was at the far end of the room in the shade. My playing is really nothing: it was nothing to speak of then, it is nothing to speak of now: but it is soft and soothing; what may be called idealistic; and some people like it. John could play a little himself, but it was too much exertion for him now. They had tried to teach Bill. He was kept hammering at it for half a year, and then the music master told Sir John that he'd rather teach a wooden post. So Bill got his release.

"The same thing that you played the evening before last, Johnny. Play that."

"But I can't. It was only some rubbish out of my own head, made up as I went along."

"Make up some more then, old fellow."

I had hardly sat down, when Lady Whitney came in, stirred the bit of fire—if they kept much, he felt the room too warm—and took one of the elbow-chairs in front of it.

"Go on, my dear," she said. "It is very pleasant to hear you."

But it was not so pleasant for me to play before her—not that, as I believed, her ears could distinguish the difference between an Irish jig and the Dead March in Saul—and I soon left off. The playing or the fire had sent Lady Whitney into a doze. I went across the room and sat down by John.

He was still looking at the sunset—the character of which had not much changed. The crimson hue was deeper; the purple bright as a precious stone; streaks of gold shot along the sky, and lay on it in small masses, like shells. Toward the north there was a broad horizon of green, and then of gold above it, and then of pale blue. Never was anything more beautiful. John's grey-blue eyes, fixed on it, had an ecstatic light in them.

"If it is so beautiful here, Johnny, what will it be *there*?" he breathed, scarcely above a whisper. "It makes one long to go."

Sometimes, when he said these things, I

hardly knew how to answer, and would let his words die off into silence.

"The picture of Heaven is getting realized in my mind, Johnny—though I know how poor an idea of it it must needs be. A wide, wide space; illimitable; with the great white throne and the rainbow about it, and the saints in their white robes falling down before it, and the harpists singing to their golden harps."

"You must think of it often."

"Very. The other night in bed, when I was between sleep and wake, I seemed to see the end—to go through it. I suppose it was one part thought, and three parts dream. I was dead, Johnny: I had already my white robe on, and angels were carrying me up to heaven. The crystal river was flowing along; masses of beautiful flowers on its banks, and the great Tree of Life in its midst, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. I seemed to see it all, Johnny. Such flowers! such hues! brighter than any jewels ever seen. These colours are lovely"—pointing to the sky—"but they are tame compared to those I saw. Myriads of happy people were there, flitting about in white, redeemed as I was; the atmosphere shone with a soft, resplendent light, the most delicious music floated in it. Oh, Johnny, think of this world with its troubles, and disappointments, and pains; and then think of that other one!"

The crimson before us began to fade into

a soft rose tint. The pure pale green and blue of the north were blending together to assume the changing hues of opal.

"There are two things I have more than loved here," he went on. "Colours and music. Not the grand clashing noise of many instruments, or the mere mechanical playing, however classically correct, of one who has acquired his *métier* by dint of hard labour : but the soft, sweet, dreamy touch that stirs the heart. Such as yours, Johnny. Stop, old fellow. I know what you would say. That your playing is no playing at all, compared to that of a skilled hand ; that the generality of people would wonder what there is in it : but, for myself, I could listen to you from night till morning."

It was very foolish of him to say this ; but I liked to hear it.

"It is the kind of music, as I have always fancied, that we shall hear in heaven. It was the kind I seemed to hear the other night in my dream ; soft, low, melodious. The *kind*, you know, Johnny ; not the same. *That* was this earth's sweetest music etherealized."

Hearing him talk like this, the idea struck me that it might be better for us all generally if we turned our thoughts more on heaven and on the life we may find there. It would not make us do our duty any the less earnestly in this world.

"Then take colours," he went on. "No

one knows the intense delight I have felt in them. On high days and holidays, my mother wears that big diamond ring of hers—you know it well, Johnny. Often and often have I stolen it from her finger, to let the light flash upon it, and lost myself for half an hour—ay, and more—gazing entranced on its changing colours. I love to see the reflected colours in the drops of the chandeliers ; I love to watch the ever-varying shades on a wide expanse of sea. Now these two things that I have so enjoyed here, bright colours and music, we have the promise of finding in heaven.”

“ Ay. The Bible tells us so.”

“ And I saw the harpers harping with their harps,” he repeated to himself—and then fell into silence. “ Johnny, look at the opal now.”

The opal was very soft and beautiful, with a light golden haze upon it.

“ And there’s the Evening Star !”

I turned my head to look. It was trembling in the sky like a spot of silver.

“ Sometimes I think I shall see the Holy City before I die,” he continued. “ See its picture as in a mirror—the New Jerusalem. Oh, Johnny ! think of its colours ! I should have to hide my eyes. Not a beauteous colour or shade but will be there : and her light like unto a jasper stone clear as crystal. The blue sapphire, the green emerald, the yellow topaz,<sup>;</sup> the sweet amethyst, the rose garnet : all the various hues

and changes seen at once. When I was a little boy—four, perhaps—papa brought me home a kaleidoscope from London. It was really a good one and its bits of glass were unusually brilliant. Johnny, if I live to be an old man, I could never hope to describe the intense joy those colours gave me—any more than I can describe to you the joy I seemed to feel the other night in that dream of heaven."

He was saying all this in a tender tone of reverence that thrilled through one.

"I remember another thing about colours. The year that papa was pricked for High Sheriff, mamma went over with him to Worcester for the March assize-time, and she took me. I was seven, I think. On the Sunday morning we went with the crowd to service in the cathedral. It was all very grand and imposing to my young mind. The crashing organ, the long procession of white-robed clergy and college boys, the two majestic beings in scarlet gowns, their trains held up by gentlemen that they should not sweep the white cathedral floor, and the wigs that frightened me! I had been told I was going to college to see the judge. In my astonished mind I don't think I knew which was judge and which was organ. Papa was in attendance on the judges: the only one that seemed to be in plain clothes in the procession. An impression remained on me that he had a white wand in

his hand : but I suppose I was wrong. Attending papa, walked his black-robed chaplain who was to preach ; he looked like a crow amid gay-plumed birds. And, lining the way all along the body of the cathedral from the grand North entrance to the gates of the choir, were papa's livery men with their glittering javelins. You've seen it all, Johnny, and know what the show is to a child such as I was. But now—will you believe that it was all as *nothing* to me, compared to the sight of the many-coloured, beautiful East window ?\* I sat in full view of it. We had gone in rather late, and so were but part of the throng. Mamma, with me in her hand—and I remember I wore purple velvet, Johnny—was stepping into the choir after the judges and clergy had taken their places, when one of the black-gowned beads-men would have rudely shut the gates upon her. Upon that, a verger pushed out his silver mace to stop him. ‘Hist,’ says he, ‘it’s the High Sheriff’s lady—my Lady Whitney ;’ and the beadsman bowed and let us pass. We were put into the pew underneath the sub-dean’s stall. It was Winnington-Ingram, I think, who was sub-dean then, but I am not sure: whoever it was, did not sit in the sub-dean’s stall, but the next to it, for he had given that up, as was customary, to one of the judges. With the great wig flowing down, right upon my

\* The old East window: not the new one.—ED.

head, as it seemed, and the sub-dean's trencher sticking over the cushion close to it, I was in a state; and they were some way through the litany—the cathedral service at Worcester began with the litany then, you remember, as they had early morning prayers—before I ventured to look up at all. As I did, the beautiful colours of the distant East window flashed upon my dazzled sight. Not dazzled with the light, Johnny, though it was a day of bright sunshine, but with the charm of the many colours. What it was to me in that moment I could never describe. That window has been abused enough by people who call themselves connoisseurs in art; but I know that to me it seemed as the very incarnation of heavenly beauty. What with the grand organ, and the chanting, and the bewildering show that had gone before, and now this sight to illuminate it, I seemed to be in nothing less than Paradise. I sat entranced; unable to take my fascinated eyes from the window: the pew faces it, you know: and were I to live for ever, I can never forget that day, or what it was to me. This will show you what colours have been to me here, Johnny: what, then, will they be to me in heaven?"

"How well you remember things!"

"I always did—things that make an impression on me," he answered. "A quiet, thoughtful child does so. You were thoughtful yourself."

True. Or I don't suppose I could have

written the papers that I have. The light in the sky faded rapidly now, and we sat in silence. John recurred to his dream.

"I thought I saw the Saviour," he whispered. "I did indeed. Over the crystal river, and beyond the white figures and the golden harps, was a great light. There stood in it One different from the rest. He had a grand, noble countenance of exquisite sweetness, and it was turned upon me with a loving smile of welcome. Johnny, I *know* it was Jesus. Oh, it will be good to be there!"

No doubt of it. Very good for him.

"The strange thing was, that I felt no fear. None. Just as securely as I seemed to lie in the arms of the angels, so did I seem secure in the happiness awaiting me. A great many of us fear death, Johnny; I see now that all fear will cease with this world, to those who die in Christ."

A sudden burst of sobs broke the stillness of the room and startled us beyond everything. Lady Whitney had woken up and was listening.

"Oh John, my darling boy, don't talk so!" she said, coming forward and laying her cheek upon his shoulder. "We can't spare you; we can't indeed."

His eyes were full of tears: so were mine. He took his mother's hand, and stroked it.

"But if it must be, mother dear?" he gently whispered. "God will temper the loss to you all."

"Any of them but you, John! You were ever my best and dearest son."

"It's all for the best, mother: it must be. The others are not ready to go."

"And don't you *care* for leaving us?" she said with a burst.

"I did care; very much; but lately I seem to have looked only to the time when we shall meet again. Mother, I do not think now I would live if the chance were offered me."

"Well, it's the first time I ever heard of young people wanting to die!" cried Lady Whitney, rubbing her eyes.

"Mother, I think we must be very nearly close on death *before* we want it," he gently answered. "Don't you see the mercy?—that when this world is passing from us, we are led insensibly to long for the next?"

She sat down in the chair that I had got up from, drawing it closer to him. A more simple-minded woman than Lady Whitney never lived. She sobbed and rubbed her face alternately. He kept her hand between his.

"It will be a great blow to me; I know that; and to your father. He feels it now more than he shows, John. You have been so good and obedient, you see; never being naughty and giving us trouble like the rest."

There was another silence. His quiet voice broke it.

"Mother dear, the thought has crossed me

lately, that it must be good to have one, whom we love very much, taken on to heaven. It must make it seem more like our final home ; it must, I think, make us more desirous to get there. ‘John’s gone on to it,’ you and papa will be thinking ; ‘we shall see him again when the end comes.’ And it will cause you to look for the end, instead of turning, frightened, away from it, as too many do. Don’t grieve, mother ! Had it been God’s will, I should have lived. But it was not ; and He is taking me to a better home. A little sooner, a little later ; it cannot make much difference which, if we are only ready for it when it comes.”

The distant bells of the church, which always rang on a Friday night, broke out upon the air. John asked to have the window opened. I threw it up, and we sat there listening. The remembrance of that hour is upon me now, just as vividly as he remembered the moment when he first saw the old East window in the cathedral. The melody of the bells ; the sweet scent of the bed of mignonette in the garden ; the calm, opal-tinted sky : I shut my eyes and realize it all.

The girls returned, bringing word that Mrs. Frost was very ill, but not much more so than usual. Directly afterwards we heard Sir John come home.

“They are afraid Barrington’s worse,” observed Helen ; “and of course it is worrying

Mrs. Frost. Mr. Carden has not been there to-day either, though he was expected: they hope he will be over the first thing in the morning."

In they trooped, Sir John and the boys; all eagerly talking of the nice afternoon they had had, and what they had seen and done at Evesham. But the room, as they said later, seemed to have a strange hush upon it, and John's face an altered look: and the eager voices died away again.

John was the one to read the chapter that night. He asked to; and chose the twenty-first of the Revelation. His voice was low, but quite distinct and clear. Making no pause at its end, he went on to the next chapter, which concludes the Bible.

"Only think what it will be, Johnny!" he said to me later, following out our previous conversation. "All manner of precious stones! all manner of glorious colours! Better even" (with a joking smile) "than the great East window."

I don't know whether it surprised me, or not, to find the house in a commotion when I woke the next morning and to hear that John Whitney was dying. A remarkable change had certainly taken place in him. He lay in bed; not insensible but almost speechless.

Breakfast was scarcely over when Mr. Carden's carriage drove in. He had been with

Barrington, having started from Worcester at day-dawn. John knew him, and took his hand and smiled.

"What's to be done for him?" questioned Sir John, pointing to his son.

Mr. Carden gave one meaning look at Sir John, and that was all. Nothing more of any kind could be done for John Whitney.

"Good-bye, Mr. Carden; good-bye," said John, as the surgeon was leaving. "You have been very kind."

"Good-bye, my boy."

"It is so sudden; so soon, you know, Carden," cried poor Sir John, as they walked down stairs together. "You ought to have warned me it was coming."

"I did not know it would be quite so soon as this," was Mr. Carden's answer—and I heard him say it.

John had visitors that day, and saw them. Some of the fellows from Frost's, who came over when they heard how it was; Dr. Frost himself; and the clergyman. At dusk, when he had been lying quietly for some time, except for the restlessness that often ushers in death, he opened his eyes and began speaking in a low whisper. Lady Whitney, thinking he wanted something, bent down her ear. But he was only repeating a verse from the Bible.

"And there shall be no light there: and they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the

Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever."

Bill, who had put his head on the bolster on the other side, burst into a stifled sob. It did not disturb the dying. They were John's last words.

Quite a crowd went to his funeral. It took place on the following Thursday. Dr. Frost and Mr. Carden (and it's not so often *he* wastes his time to go to a funeral !) and Featherstone and the Squire amidst them. Poor Sir John sobbed over the grave, and did not mind who saw and heard him, while they cast the spadefuls of earth on the coffin.

*"Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life."*

That the solemn promise was applicable to John Whitney, and that he had most assuredly entered on that glorious life, I knew as well then as I know now. The corruptible had put on incorruption, the mortal immortality.

Not much of a story, you will say. But I might have told a worse. And I hope, seeing we must all go out at the same gate, that we shall be as ready for it as he was.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

THE END.











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